The Idea of Europe in World Literature from the Eastern and Western Peripheries

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ……..

Abstract

While a vast range of works have been written on European identity from historical, cultural, political, sociological, and economic points of view, I am attempting to turn the discourse around and investigate the complex notion of European identity that forms the basis of personal, collective and societal identities represented in literature and a European space imagined and depicted differently by various writers. My thesis explores the diverse interpretations of Europe by creating and investigating a literary dialogue between some works in Hungarian and British contemporary literature and so, in a generalized sense, in some aspects between the Eastern and Western peripheries of Europe. The literary interpretation of Europe and European identity is a neglected research area, just as is the literary dialogue between the Western and the Eastern parts of the European Union. Due to this lack of exemplary methodological routes, the thesis's comparative nature and the fact that it deals with the cultural positions and literary capitals of two very unequal countries, the methodological background is provided by world literary approaches.

Widening the time-scale from the most recent works to ones published in the 1990's and some even before the fall of the Iron Curtain presented the opportunity for analysing the dynamic character of British and Hungarian perceptions and the changing focus on prevalent themes. Imre Kertész (1929-2016) was primarily concerned by the formulation and articulation of new ethical and philosophical values for Europe emerging on the ethical zero ground of the Holocaust and focused on a detached, theoretical observation of the individual. Brian Aldiss (1925-2017) was more interested in the active and often contradictory aspects of identity and the practical moral dilemmas after the Wars in twentieth-century Europe. Marina Lewycka's (1946-) novels deal with the European aspects of migration concerning the different generations and the gender dimensions of the Europe concept. László Végel (1941-) writes about the utopia of Europe as a multi-ethnic unity and explores the minority identity in relation to the migrant existence. Tim Parks (1954-) approaches the issues of fate and destiny, and their relevance to European politics and personal choices, while also investigating the possibility of

linguistic schizophrenia. Gábor Németh's (1956-) novels investigate the symbolism inherent in European Jewish identity and cosmopolitanism and the current attitudes on populism and anti-immigration.

The perspective and the focus from which the novels are analysed have been influenced by present events, and the political, social and cultural atmosphere of both countries and the EU. I have been trying to spot signs which might have forecast the disillusionment and hostility felt towards the European dream by the majority of both populations. The disappointment over the dissolving vision of a united Europe has emerged as an overall theme connecting the writers' works; however, the pressing want of free-spirits, the Nietzschean Good Europeans, has also been persistent.

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Introduction

A European Identity?

While a vast range of works have been published on European identity discussing it from several: historical, cultural, political, sociological, economic points of view, I am attempting to turn the discourse around and investigate the complex notion of European identity that forms the basis of personal, collective and societal identities represented in literature and a European space imagined and depicted differently by various writers. As the novels are working with intricate systems of allusions to European identity it is important to realise that the majority of the works engaged with this theme conflate, using Gerard Delanty's terms, individual, collective (it 'is not simply the aggregation of individual identities, but the self-understanding of a particular group'), and societal identities ('broad cultural categories […] which include within them more concrete collective identities'), (Delanty, 'Is There' 76). Delanty in his article 'Is There a European Identity?' identifies four aspects of identity: first, the constructed nature of identity, which 'arises only in relation to social action' and changes in the course of time (76). Second, that 'identity is not an idea or a cultural given, but a mode of self-understanding that is expressed by people's ongoing narratives' (76). Third, 'identity is based on a difference and thus exists in a relational context' and the fourth is the multiple identities aspect, when these identities coexist 'in varying degrees of tension with each other' (77).

Regenia Gagnier in her book *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization* (2010) acknowledged 'recent concern with the European Union, currently constituted as a market' about the want of an "identity" or, using Stefan Elbe's observation in *Europe: A Nietzschean Perspective* (2003), about the absence of a 'unifying vision'[1] (Gagnier 137). Elbe gives a convincing overview of the manifestations of the European identity crisis pronounced and proclaimed in political, social and academic circles. He, however, by exploring Friedrich Nietzsche's investigation of European nihilism, its consequences and a possible response to it, attempts to render the contemporary debate on the European idea

[1] Elbe gives an overview of its contemporary manifestation in political, social and academic circles.

‘intelligible within the larger context of European secularization’ (Elbe 38). He argues that ‘it is not only the particular Christian or scientific worldview that loses its ground following the ‘death of God’, but the entire 2,000-year-old practice of endowing existence with a greater sense of meaning by determining the overall truth of existence’ (38-39). He observes that as the meaningful collective existence of Europeans ceased to ‘reside in the progressive unfolding of world history, as the Cold War ideologies had promised’ and Europe ‘conceived primarily as a common economic market’ does not seem to satisfy people’s innate need for meaning’, Europeans are confronted again with the questions occupying Nietzsche (41, 62). Nietzsche devised the term ‘incomplete nihilism’ to refer to those modern responses to nihilism that merely seek ‘to replace the worship of the old God with the worship of more secular idols and ideologies’ and in which ‘the will to truth of Europe’s Christian-Platonic heritage remains operational’ (42-43). In Nietzsche’s view, the appeal of modern nationalism is another form of incomplete nihilism, moreover, as Elbe points out, ‘the European Union harbours the great danger of simply replicating the specific logic of nationalism […] albeit on a much larger scale’ (70). He argues that ‘the majority of support historically achieved by the political project of Europe was based on a strategy of incomplete nihilism, on projecting a particular, fixed, and benign idea of Europe – the European Union as the culmination of Europe’s common cultural heritage, and as a protracted zone of peace and unity’ (72-73). While Nietzsche saw himself ‘as being greatly indebted’ to European culture, he equally realised that ‘the deeper implications of the advent of European nihilism had called into question the intellectual credibility of much of this cultural heritage’ and necessitated ‘the critical reappraisal of some of its key concepts’ (73). This concern resonates with Imre Kertész’s argument, discussed in Chapter 2, that the formulation and articulation of new ethical and philosophical values are vital for Europe emerging on the ethical ground zero of the Holocaust.

Nietzsche, in Elbe’s interpretation, would argue that ‘attempts to articulate a more animating conception of Europe along traditional lines, as well as the copious references to the ‘crisis of meaning’ witnessed in the post-Cold War era, only preserve this traditional language of ascetic ideals, and draw much of the debate onto this terrain’ (Elbe 112). In contrast, Nietzsche introduced the concept of the ‘active’ nihilism of the ‘good Europeans’, ‘free spirits’ with a deep intellectual

freedom, who would 'view the absence of a more meaningful idea of Europe not as a reason for despair, but rather as the moment of an immense re-enchantment of European existence' (113). As a result of rejecting Europe as a traditional notion of identity Gagnier also explores the Nietzschean concepts of 'The Last Man' and the 'Good Europeans' or "free spirits' - 'in the making of a certain kind of critical and creative person, in possession of both rational and emotional capacities' (139). She summarises:

> In Nietzsche's *fin-de-siècle* analysis Europe had emerged as the Christian continent, the Occident defined in relation to the Orient. When God "died", or Europe began to secularize, intellectuals began to question not God's existence but rather the disillusionment evoked by that secularization. Sacred truth was replaced by scientific truth and then the truth of the nation. As each of these was delegitimated through the catastrophes of the twentieth century, they were replaced by what Nietzsche had predicted as the Last Man. The Last Man was rational economic Man – blinking, shallow, selfish, egotistical, abandoning both the idealism and *Machtpolitic* of the Victorians and bringing an end to their progressive history in his modest pursuit of individual self-interest. (Gagnier 138)

In contrast, good Europeans or free spirits are 'without homeland and mixed in race and descent' and their attributes include 'the freedom or openness to question both Christian and scientific, religious and secular, will to truth; to reject nationalism; and to experience nihilism as freedom to build new worlds' (139). Gagnier abstracts the Nietzschean idea of 'free spirits" 'to counteract a "spiritless," "institutional", or "bureaucratic" perception of the European Union': the good Europeans 'express western or Christian individuality without being individualists, selfish, or egotistic. They do not need the authority of one truth; they can live outside one home and without private property; and they can experience each of these as freedom to solve problems and build new worlds' (144). Elbe appropriated Nietzsche's 'good Europeans' to the present meaning of the European idea and concluded that these free spirits would want to see a Europe that:

> (i) avoids nationalist and racist interpretations of existence; (ii) that refuses to fix the deeper meaning of the European idea and thus also remains open to those who currently remain outside the borders of the European Union; (iii) that would not seek to impose its freedom on

> others, but would equally not shy away from exemplifying a commitment to a deep experience of freedom; and (iv) that seeks to address the problem of the increasing globalization of the 'last man' through combating the refusal to cultivate, within existence, an important reflective depth. (Elbe 2003, 120-121)

Elbe believes that the Nietzschean's idea 'could contribute to a peaceful European community not because Europeans would share an identical and homogenous conception of what it means to be European, but rather because they would share a deep and valued experience of autonomy' and 'immense spiritual vitality and courage in undertaking this experiment' (119).

In Hungary the expression "européer"[2] carries similar meaning to the Nietzschean Good European in contrast with the word "európai" which means "a person from Europe". These expressions, however, still emphasise 'the notion that there is an essentially European culture, and that culture distinguishes Europe from the rest of the world' (Martin). Gagnier found it arguable that

> the economic, political, legal, and cultural functions of Europe – especially as a mediator [in the world] always on the move – today are better than a European identity that in the past has proven fatal. "Identities" are usually accompanied by an emphasis on "shared values,", which are often constructed in opposition to others' "values." Rhetorical reifications of identity values can harden hatreds, whereas what is needed is not to start with identities or values at all but rather to begin with problems to be solved or wants to be negotiated. (Gagnier 143)

She promotes the late Victorian idea of Europe as "function" rather than "identity" as 'that relations of individual to social or part to whole might best be conceived as functions rather than identities' (137). Concerning Europe as an individual identity Gagnier's concept of cosmopolitanism provides a liveable solution. As an alternative to the contemporary notions of neo-liberal neo-cosmopolitanism Gagnier introduces the ancient idea of *oikeiosis*:

[2] The expression "européer" is widely used in contemporary public discourse and was already common in 1903 as it can be seen in the usage of one of the most famous Hungarian poets Endre Ady in an article against narrow nationalism. (Ady) The Hungarian expression is an adaptation of the German "Europäer" word, which also means primarily only "a person from Europe".

> *Oikeiosis* is a rational *natural* order that ensures that animals are immediately drawn toward what serves and preserves them. Associated with an image of concentric circles, it is not an individual's psychological state or disposition, but a process of informing behaviour toward others. As a pebble dropped in water creates a spreading set of circles, so in psychological materialism the self-concern at work in *oikeiosis* tends systematically to broaden its scope to encompass not just the individual but a progressively larger domain of those around her – the immediate family, household, city, to the whole of rational humanity. In outer circles, cosmopolitan concern does not equal flat moral universalism (or deontology, in which my commitment to the world is as obligated as that to my family), but is rather a final stage, as the self-concern already at work in the infant systematically expands to wider circles of inclusion, providing normative guidance in action. Understanding *oikeiosis* as an impulse to preserve oneself and feel affection for one's own constitution, self-consciousness becomes not a *Cogito* ("I think") but a comprehending affect, not a knowledge of one's own psychological state but of one's own bodily constitution. It follows that its main role is not to prop up the knowledge that I exist in a particular identity (I am) but rather to guide or motivate what I do or how I act. This kind of evolutionary development of social consciousness or what is called elsewhere the evolution of morality seems more promising than both deontological and identity-based cosmopolitanisms. (Gagnier 149-150)

While Kertész focused on a detached, theoretical observation of the individual, Brian Aldiss, whose works are analysed in Chapter 3, is more interested in the active aspects of identity, in the representation of, with Rosi Braidotti's words 'the enfleshed, sexed and contradictory nature of the human subject, where fantasies, desires and the pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role as rational judgement and standard political action' (Braidotti, 'Feminist' 205).

Braidotti's definition of the feminist perspective can also provide a useful approach to any aspect of identity, consequently to European identity as well. For her 'the feminist project encompasses both the level of subjectivity, in the sense of historical agency, political and social entitlement, and the level of identity, which is linked to consciousness, desire, and the politics of the personal: it covers both the conscious and the unconscious levels' (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 155). In the thesis Braidotti's project of 'feminist nomadism' has proved essential not only in the analyses of the representation of European identity in relation to women but also in a more general sense. Braidotti divides the project of feminist nomadism 'into three phases, all of which will be linked to sexual difference' but these different levels are

‘not dialectically ordained phases but rather a demonstration of how they can coexist chronologically’ (150-151). Nomadism for her means not to dwell within dogmatic frames and traditional stereotypes and representations but to set out on a road of discovery and explore the land of transition. Braidotti emphasises that the three phases of “difference between men and women”, “differences among women” and “differences within each woman” are ‘not to be taken as a categorical distinction, but as an exercise in naming different facets of a single complex phenomenon’ (151).

It is crucial to emphasise that for Braidotti “difference” is a positive term and set in opposition to "difference” from the dualistic perspective that in the European history of philosophy has always been presented in the relation of domination and exclusion, when ‘to be different from came to mean to be “less than”, to be worth less than’ (Braidotti, ‘Identity’ 158). ‘In this dialectical scheme of thought, difference or otherness is a constitutive axis which marks off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native), and the naturalized other (animals, the environment, or earth)’ (158). In the modern history of Europe this notion of difference has been appropriated by totalitarian and fascist political systems (159). The problem of the pejorative sense of “difference”, according to Braidotti in 2002,

> has become more urgent in the context of the recent history of the European Union which has included a wave of nostalgic reassertion of local identities, producing a nationalistic, xenophobic and often racist climate. The renewed emphasis on the unification process has resulted in making ‘difference’ more divisive and contrasted than ever. In the paradox of simultaneous globalization and fragmentation, which I regard as characteristic of late postmodernity in Europe today, the notion of ‘difference’ has become even more antagonistic. The disintegration of the Soviet block and the ethnic wars that followed have also contributed to resurrecting the ghost of difference as pejoration. (Braidotti, ‘Identity’ 159)

For Braidotti one of the aims of feminism is ‘to overthrow the negative, oppressive connotations that are built into the notion of difference and the dialectics of Self and Other’ and it is based on a perspective for which both deconstruction and decentralisation are absolutely necessary (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 159). She emphasises ‘a vision of the thinking, knowing subject as not-one, but rather as

being split over and over again in a rainbow of yet uncoded and ever so beautiful possibilities' (150).

At the second methodological level Braidotti identifies the central issue as 'how to create, legitimate, and represent a multiplicity of alternative forms of feminist subjectivity without falling into relativism. The starting point is the recognition that Woman is a general umbrella term that brings together different kinds of women, different levels of experience, and different identities' (154). The same issue about the general umbrella term of European is at stake in the thesis.

In relation to Europe and the rest of the world, Gagnier refers to Etienne Balibar's vision of Europe in his *We, the People of Europe?* (2004) in which Europe is perceived as a borderland, a 'spontaneous collective agency' changing in accordance with time and new agents (Gagnier 140). According to Gagnier, this functional perspective on Europe is valid and practical as 'described as a continent, defined by waters to the west, north, and south, no obvious geographical feature divides "Europe" from the "continent" of Asia to the East', consequently, Turkey, like Russia, is 'no longer its Other' (142). A similar focus on change is articulated by Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande. 'Europe is not a fixed condition. Europe is another word for variable geometry, variable national interests, variable involvement, variable internal-external relations, variable statehood and variable identity. [….] The EU is *an institutionized 'more and further'*, it is geared to movement, to a process that transcends and interconnects the internal and the external' (Beck and Grande 6).

However, Bo Sträth, when looking back on the changing concept of Europe through history in the introduction of *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other* (2000) stated that 'the image of a European identity necessarily contains the demarcation of the non-European. This is the Janus head of every distinction, which is necessarily both exclusive and inclusive' (Sträth, 'Multiple' 15). Furthermore, he emphasises that 'Europe can also emerge as the Other from within, that is, from within what others consider to be Europe, as a kind of self-imposed exclusion' (15). His examples include 'when Europe is referred to as "the Continent" in Great Britain and parts of Scandinavia' and the case of the countries

of Eastern Europe[3] (15). He believes that Europe is 'a discourse which is translated into a political and ideological project' or rather projects as 'both as politics and ideology, Europe must be seen in the plural, always contested and contradictory' (14). He highlights that European identity has been defined in a conflictual process when 'various histories are mobilised in order to legitimise a European identity, the majority with the pretension to represent *the* true story', while it cannot be defined in an unanimous way (16). Similarly, the 'unity of European culture would not derive from universal values but rather from a critical and reflexive distance to value production, where the values are under constant negotiation and transformation' (14). He believes that a community is constructed and identified 'less through history *per se*, in the sense that history carries within a certain direction' but more through the process and communication of the interaction between ideas of heterodoxy and orthodoxy (18). He also adds that 'this communication has two dimensions: it is both a translation of the past to our time, and a retrospective "projection" *from* our time, of images of concord and dissent in the past' (18).

Tim Parks in his novels *Europa* and *Destiny*, analysed in Chapter 6, explores the notion of Europe as 'a claim to distinction' (Parks, *Europa* 13). Anthony Pagden states that '[a]t first "Europe" designated a vague geographical region distinguished less by what it was than what it was not. In time, however, this sense of difference, of being unlike the other regions into which the world was divided, became more distinct. One feature of this difference, which in various ways has remained constant over time, is the belief that Europeans have always pursued roughly similar political ends' (Pagden, 'Introduction' 3). In 2002 he believed that all European states were 'committed to the principles of liberal democracy', which, however, created a 'double imposition' for Western European states: 'the need to repudiate their imperial past while clinging resolutely to the belief that there can be no alternative to the essentially European liberal democratic states. Any attempt at something different is either (like Marxism) doomed to economic failure or (like the various forms of religious fundamentalism)

[3] There are various terms to indicate that part of Europe which used to belong to the Eastern block. As there is no obvious consistency in the usage among the theoreticians, the writers and the characters, the individual applications of these expressions are preserved in the whole thesis. A similar approach has been applied concerning the regular confusion of the terms Europe and European Union.

ultimately tyrannical' (22, 11). Andrew Hammond pointed out that the EU when facing the membership intention of 'a bankrupt, and recently communist, eastern Europe' found a twofold solution, (Hammond, *The Novel* 10). 'Firstly, there was an absolute insistence on the nature of Europeanness – the continent was heir to Graeco-Roman, Christian and Enlightenment values, not to Marxism – and secondly on the political and economic forms of free-market capitalism' (10), Similarly, as Catherine Horel observed in 2011, Central Europeans feel strongly that they belong to the Europe constituted by the Western part and for them any period of their history when this was not the case, for example, the Turkish or Soviet occupation, is a diversion from the normal. Horel emphasises the importance of the common Christian background as 'everything that separate them from their Western foundations Central European people experience with pain, as retrogression to the barbarism of orthodoxy for some, while for others of Muslims, although their neighbours remain nearer to them than their distant ideals'[4] (Horel 15-16).[5]

Gagnier points out that 'Europe was distinctive because of its religion, when it opposed itself to Islam. But in the course of European history, European religion came to develop another source of distinctiveness, also allied to its individualism, its optative quality' (Gagnier 158). Using the sociologist of religion Robert Bellah's distinction 'between theoretic, or critical and scientific, dimensions of human culture and mythic (which he defines as narrative) and mimetic (which he defines as bodily enactive) dimensions' she emphasises that '[f]reedom of religion as something that we can choose, as if from an interdenominational menu, is a very modern idea. It is theoretic religion, whereas most religions in the world are mythic or mimetic' (158). Taking Bellah's dimensions of culture into consideration Gagnier's notion of Europe as a function and not a fixed identity becomes much more vivid and applicable for everyday experiences. What this thesis is set out to do is to explore the mythic or

[4] In the thesis when the title of a work, both creative and theoretical, is given in the original Hungarian version instead of in English it indicates that the work has not yet been translated into English and the quotation is my attempt at a literary translation. The English translation of a title (immediately following the original in brackets) appears in the text only when it has significance in the argument, but all of the titles are translated in the Bibliography.

[5] While this internal division of Europe holds strongly even today, it is important to keep in mind that, as Hammond puts it, these feelings have been feeding on the crude mixture of 'nationalism, xenophobia and economic opportunism' (Hammond, *The Novel* 21).

narrative dimension of this function and through literature's representative function some aspects of the mimetic dimensions as well. As Bellah argues 'in important spheres of life stories cannot be replaced by theories' as they 'provide their substance' (Bellah 10).

> Narrative, in short, is more than literature; it is the way we understand our lives. If literature merely supplied entertainment, then it wouldn't be as important as it is. Great literature speaks to the deepest level of our humanity; it helps us better understand who we are. Narrative is not only the way we understand our personal and collective identities, it is the source of our ethics, our politics, and our religion. (10)

Michel Herzfeld claims that 'individualism has long been a stereotype of European identity and explains 'the conventional self-view of Europeans as autonomous selves possessing discrete property and distinctive properties' (Herzfeld 139). According to him this concept 'was powerfully exported through colonial and other extensions of the imperial European presence' and so has acquired 'a truly global significance: as the "common sense" of universalizing models of responsibility and rationality, it precludes alternative visions of the relationship between self and society' (139-140). He points out that

> the apparent contradiction between individualism and the nation-state teleology that demands conformism in matters of identity can be resolved in at least three different ways. First, state representations of individualism are undeniably social prescriptions. Second, the anthropological convention that opposed state structures to segmentary polities is misleading, in that nation-states are administratively and conceptually arranged in hierarchically ranked tiers of mutually opposed subunits […] Third, the reification of culture as a national possession renders it immediately analogous to land, which is always divisible as private property even though, "territorial integrity" justifies its defence in times of war. The literature of many European (and other) countries is replete with stirring tales of homes and fields, privately owned, providing the very basis of the emotional appeal that inspired citizens to acts of patriotic heroism. (Herzfeld 152)

He suggests that it can be useful to show

> how such values become incorporated - that is, quite literally, embodied – in the practices of everyday life, reducing the space for alternative

> visions. It can also suggest ways in which persistent forms of localism and resistance to official dogma can subvert and refashion these dominant ideas to the point where the official ideology may emerge as a serious misinterpretation of large segments of the popular imagination. (Herzfeld 140)

Referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation-state 'as an "imagined community" grounded in an idealized notion of "national character" and the modal national self', Herzfeld proposes to 'ask whose imagination is it' (140). 'The vision of the nation-state promulgated by elites may not be profoundly shared by most citizens *even though they may speak of the nation using exactly the same language and imaginary*' (140). He emphasises 'the considerable variation among groups of citizens in their interpretation of the significance, viability, and appropriate forms of nationhood' (140). He points out the importance of Anthony P. Cohen's notion of "personal nationalism" (143). Cohen focuses on the personal dimension of nationalism and the difference between a 'regime's representations of the nation and individuals' interpretations of those representations' (Cohen 804). As an ethnographer he, however, is conscious of how much his notion helps the comparison of different nations as 'the license or room for manoeuvre that the self may have in constructing a personal nationalism is likely to vary with political and cultural circumstances' (808).

He also reinterprets 'the crucial role of boundary in provisioning identity' and James Boon's argument that 'all identity is contrastive, indeed that this is its very rationale' (805). He claims that 'this is an argument with roots deep in that tradition of social psychological writing in which individuals are depicted as "taking the role of the other" or as reacting to "the significant other"' (805). For him the issue is the 'denial to others of an authorial identity, an identity predicated on a consciousness of self that does not merely reflect the other, or respond to the boundary in question' (805). In other words, as Herzfeld puts it, 'people recast the official images of nationalistic ideology' in pragmatic ways 'as a result of experience in all its inevitable diversity' (Herzfeld 143). 'Their *uses* of that ideology allow them to carve out personal manoeuvring space within the collective' (143). While it might look as if Cohen was 'simply reproducing the European ideology of individualism' Herzfeld argues that Cohen in the context of Scottish politics and nationalism aims

‘to recognize the capacity of ordinary social actors to recast and reconfigure received orthodoxies’ in opposition to ‘methodological individualism in political terms’ which is ‘precisely the abandonment of the social’ with the aim to destroy the very possibility of agency by emasculating the social in favour of a centralised and centralizing ideology of personal autonomy’ (143-144). Hertzfeld promotes Cohen’s approach as it allows

> to work away from generalisations about individualism and toward a clearer sense of what cultural features such stereotypes invoke and why they might prove appealing to particular segments of the population. Who has an interest in promoting the idea that there is a distinctively European self and under what conditions? Which elements in this stereotype appear to be constant, and which are contested? How do these localized usages articulate with nationalistic and regional identity politics and ideologies, and how do individual actors deploy the rhetorics of these ideologies for more immediate practical ends? (144)

Although both Gagnier’s and Braidotti’s notions of identity is much complex and intricate, the issues raised by Hertzfeld are useful not only because he draws the attention to the deconstruction of national and European ideologies and the forced opposition between social and individual identity but also as the structure of national identity is still commonly projected onto the European identity (Sträth, ‘Multiple’ 13). As Sträth wrote, ‘European identity is usually seen in relation to national identity, either in tension-filled opposition to it, that is, as an alternative which might replace the nation, or in a relationship where it overlaps and supplements the nation’ (13).

Herzfeld believes ‘the geographical and political margins of Europe’ to be the best examples to understand the ways how the idea of Europe spreads and is promoted and interpreted. He argues that ‘even in the most formal sense, European colonialism was by no means confined to non-European peoples’ (Herzfeld 145). The British domination of Malta and Cyprus’, ‘the English domination of Scotland and Ireland’ or ‘the Soviet domination of much Eastern and Central Europe’ are some of the examples (145). Herzfeld argues that the analyses of these places where the separation of ‘the West from the Rest’ occurs and is internalized by the nation and its people help to ‘probe *beyond* stereotypes, or to ask who *uses* the stereotypes, for what purposes, and under what circumstances’

(147). Although Britain and Hungary have held completely opposing positions of power and influence in European history, their recent attitude towards the European Union, and the scepticism felt about European identity that has been spreading in their peoples create the ground for an interesting comparison.

Luisa Passerini refers to the European Community's *Declaration on European Identity* to highlight the contradictions of its Eurocentrism and that at that point 'an "essential part" of Europe's supposed identity was represented by a common market based on a customs union, established institutions, as well as policies and machinery for cooperation' (Passerini, 'From' 194). According to her the *Declaration* 'highlights dangers implicit in attaching the notion of European identity to the idea (and the reality) of a united Europe' (195). Sträth emphasising this difference points out that while both notions have been around for centuries, the idea of a united Europe was developed dynamically and connected to the hopes of a long-lasting pacifist peace after the Second World War but took political form in the armed-peace framework of the Cold War, while 'the concept of a European identity emerged in a situation of experienced crisis for national economic governance' in the 1970s (Sträth, 'Multiple' 18-19). Moreover, as Elbe describes, since then there has been the growing feeling that the institutional project of Europe serves 'the interests of national and European bureaucracies and governments' and 'the project of European integration is often not driven by an overriding and greater cause, but by much narrower, material interests', by the 'desire to expand markets, to increase the social and geographical mobility of labour, to reduce transaction costs, and increase investment potential' (Elbe 78). This way Passerini's insistence on the connected but independent nature of the concepts of the European Union and the European identity has special significance. She argues that the 'theme of a united Europe is in force in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields, while identity refers to a field that is at the same time wider and narrower. Identity moves from everyday life in its material and emotional aspects to "high" and "low" cultural forms of the elites and the masses' (Passerini, 'From' 195). All the books in the thesis touch on the elite and the popular masses. Literature, especially popular as Aldiss's science fiction and Lewycka's romantic novels, might be a way to explore segments of both the

elite and popular interpretations of European identity and the connection between them.

The question between the perception of the elite and the everyday people is also present when investigating 'the link between the idea of a united Europe and the institutional reality of the European Union' (Passerini, 'From' 192). Passerini argues that while 'ideas did indeed play a role in the history in the European integration' and it was not 'simply the result of member states' calculations to maintain their wealth', these ideas were 'the result of the political and cultural elites, not of the popular masses' (192). Ildikó Lendvai comparing the Brexit referendum to the Hungarian referendum held in the same year on whether to accept EU migrant quota, argues that they are about the anti-elite feelings of the public and the chance to take revenge on 'the most powerful authority, the transnational elite' (Lendvai). She reasons that 'alongside with the EU's organisation having become more intricate and bureaucratic, the pathos of the slogans have faded, the moral content has increasingly disappeared behind the words on the institutions' (Lendvai). According to Lisa Mckenzie, 'the EU referendum debate has opened up a Pandora's box of working-class anger and frustration' as those people whose 'voices are rarely heard outside their communities' saw a possibility 'that something might change for them if they vote to leave the EU' (Mckenzie). She argues that due to their worsening standards of living the referendum debate within working-class communities was 'not about immigration, despite the rhetoric' but 'about precarity and fear' (Mckenzie).

Károly Fazekas when writing about the current political processes, such as the aging population in the developed countries, the result of the presidential election in the USA, the escalation of terrorism, the unknown consequences of Brexit, the illiberal transformations in Russia and Turkey[6], the horrors of the Syrian war and the scale of European migrant crisis, observes that what characterises our present age is uncertainty. 'We cannot calculate the expected consequences of our own or others' actions. We are made uncertain by that the events do not follow a known and predictable regular pattern' (Fazekas). He observes that the written and unwritten rules that generally govern our lives do not seem to work and the

[6] Not to forget Hungary.

institutions responsible for them prove to be unable to cope with the scale and complexity of the situations. Consequently, he argues, among people there is a common desire for a belief that there exists 'a deterministic logic behind the current events' even without our understanding and influence, so although we are impotent, at least we can feel that we are not responsible for the horrors we experience around us (Fazekas). This wishful self-acquittal can be one aspect in the problematic concept of destiny that regularly appears in all of the discussed novels and in the public and scientific debate on Europe. Elemér Hankiss summarises three main ways to transform life into destiny. Destiny can be either interpreted as a calling, a mission, or destiny can be discovered by using the principles of the gestalt theory, (the inclination to form a whole out of fragments, the principles of closure, invariance, multistability), and finally, using Socrates's idea, destiny is the explained life (Hankiss 72-80). All these three forms, their unintentional resurfacing or problematic realisation are investigated in the chapters as one of the connecting motif in the novels.

Gagnier considers 'Europe as a functional relation rather than an identity and cosmopolitanism as an inevitable ongoing process rather than an ideal state' (Gagnier 26). She contrasts Morris's substantive cosmopolitanism with current liberal neo-cosmopolitanism' and sees 'his work in light of current models to move beyond western exceptionalism' (137). Writing about Charles Godfrey Leland Gagnier observes that Leland 'saw the Gypsies and the Jews as the original cosmopolitans', in the sense that cosmopolitanism meant 'tolerance of difference and the possibility of communication across the nations' (26). The interconnectedness of language and the intellectual and emotional position towards nationality and belonging to Europe and to the whole world appears in relation to cosmopolitanism in the discussed novels. Deleuze and Guattari raised the question when referring to Kafka 'how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? (Deleuze and Guattari 19). Being cosmopolitan changes the schizophrenic condition - of the Holocaust survivor by Kertész, of the bilingualism by Parks, of the East-Central European peripheral situation by Végel – into a liberated celebration of diversity, just as in the case of Braidotti's nomadism.

As I am going to prove this process through the cases of the three Hungarian writers of the thesis, these concepts of 'the European Jew' and européer that are inseparable first from historical causes, later become rather conscious acts, and at last positive statements. While for Kertész Jewishness means an enforced position from outside which he is destined to face and make sense of, for Végel it is the embodiment of his minority position and a creative act of celebrating it, and for Gábor Németh, whose novels are analysed in the last chapter, it becomes an existential state, an intellectual and moral standpoint. In parallel with the changing notion of and attitude towards Jewishness the concept and meaning of the européer is shifting from the search for a set identity, as for Kertész it means the identification of universal values, to the acceptance of an inescapable complex condition for Végel, to a process as it is described by Gagnier's and Braidotti's notions of identity. Gagnier using Stuart Hall's distinction between 'the elite cosmocrats benefiting from economic globalization ("globalization from above")' and '"vernacular" cosmopolitans who, not seeking the global life, were nonetheless thrown into it and remained "open to what I am not"': 'the little people getting by, tolerating others as best as they can, clarifying, in all their languages, the wishes and struggles of the age' concludes that cosmopolitanism 'is a collective event in which we are always already engaged rather than an individual Taste or aspirational disposition' (Gagnier 164). The literary presentation of this world can be seen in Chapter 7 on Németh's books.

When considering Europe as a function rather than an identity in literature Gagnier argues that '[t]here can be the comparative category of the European novel without there being an identifiably European author' (161). At the same time, in my thesis the enormous difference between the literary capitals of the Hungarian and the British literatures has to be taken into account. Mike Phillips investigates 'the vacuum with which British fiction explores East European life that amounts to a cultural deficit, where the lack of useful imagery about the region and its people, practically condemns' the British 'to silence and indifference' (Phillips 47). When comparing it to the reception of culture from the former colonies he identifies two main influential factors. On the one hand, 'the British already had developed feeling for the history of their Empire, nourished and reinforced by a succession of post-war conflicts […] In many ways, therefore, British fiction anticipated the

postcolonial themes and concern which were to become integral for its future' (46) On the other hand,

> at another level, the fact that the British shared the English language with the colonised opened up the landscape of political and emotional details which offered British fiction unprecedented access to the idea and dreams of individuals abroad. This included the fiction emerging from the post-migrant segments of the population. Eastern Europe could not offer the British any access of this kind. Few, or hardly any, of the most notable fiction writers from the East are translated into English (46)

The role of translation and the process of selecting the works to be translated is discussed in the thesis. Phillips believes that it is the role of fiction writers to create the imagery that can be the foundation of a common understanding in Europe. Still, even the literary analyses of the book *Facing the East in the West, Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture* seems to focus on immigrant literature and travel writing with only few exceptions.

'Like many proto-national figures, Europe was the name of a woman. As such it had the power of mystification', stated Delanty. The abduction of Europa has been the theme of many works of literature and visual arts and the name of the Phoenician princess seduced by Zeus, the supreme god of the ancient Greeks, transformed into a white bull appears also as the title of Tim Parks' novel *Europa* (Delanty, *Inventing* 17). The process of idealising women and pushing them into the realm of imposed labels and assigned roles removes their reality and individuality and places them into a safe distance reinforcing the boundaries of the male self. As Sherry Booth observed about the historical record, it 'has consistently written women out of history, or when they are present these women serve most often as adjunct to men or as anomalies', the same is also very much observable concerning the examined male characters and even the writers (Booth 45). They raise the female figures into the realm of symbolic and by this means simplify them and completely cast them into the habitual dimensions only functional from the male perspective. That women are the symbols and men are the symbol makers seems generally to be the accepted norm in the books analysed with the exception of Végel's book *Balkáni szépség avagy Slemil fattyúja* (Balkan Beauty or the Bastard of Slemil) in which the three women are not only the helpless subjects of

this process but become conscious participants in the creation of their symbolic representations. Even Lewycka, the only female writer discussed, while showing great sensitivity towards the authentic portrayal of individual identities, in the case of British-born subjects, concerning immigrants falls into the trap of representing group mentalities and stereotypes.

Accepting that the political and cultural concerns of the present shape the fictional past, I cannot deny or regret the fact that the perspective and the focus from which the novels are analysed have been greatly influenced by the present events, political, social and cultural atmosphere of both countries and the EU. I have been trying to spot signs in them which might have forecast the unexpected changes that occurred in both countries and led to the disillusionment and hostility felt towards the European dream by the majority of both populations.

The widening of the time-scale from the most recent works to works published in the 1990s and some even before the fall of the Iron Curtain presented the opportunity for analysing the changing character of the British and Hungarian perceptions. At the same time, due to the scale of my research and the general perception, I was forced on some occasions to conflate the countries in the Eastern side of the European Union and also in the United Kingdom. I pay attention to the ways British writers strive for authenticity and investigate the ways they perceive the role and meaning of writing for themselves and for their community, as I believe this is especially informative in comparison with the Hungarian perspectives.

Chapter 1 is about the theoretical approaches to world literature. Chapter 2 considers the ideas of Imre Kertész on Europe. This chapter shows the culture and values of the old Europe shattered by the Second World War and the bitter but relentless search for new ones. Chapter 3 analyses Brian Aldiss's novels, especially the Squire Quartet and *Super-State*. The key themes are the practical moral dilemmas after the Wars in twentieth-century Europe, the European internal divisions, the European Union as utopia or dystopia, and the notions of individual and collective memory. Chapter 4 deals with Marina Lewycka's novels; the European aspects of migration and the immigrant identity are examined here and the gender dimensions of the Europe concept are explored. Chapter 5 investigates the European identity presented in László Végel's three novels. Some of the main themes are the utopia of Europe as a multi-ethnic unity (also present in Aldiss's

work), the minority identity in relation to the immigrant identity, the division of Europe (also in Aldiss's and Németh's), the issue of fate, destiny and choice (in Parks's), the linguistic schizophrenia (in Parks's), and the symbolism of the Balkan Woman (in Lewycka's). Chapter 6 is on Tim Parks's novels and non-fictional works. It considers the myth of Europa, theories about destiny, fate and choice and their relevance to European politics. Chapter 7 is on Gábor Németh's novels It discusses a particular aspect of the European Jewish identity (also present in Kertész's and Végel's work) and investigates current attitudes on populism and anti-immigration (also in Lewyka's). The last chapter draws the conclusion on the applied methodology and the theories of world literature, brings together the discussed notions of Europe, and shows the directions of possible further research.

While the whole thesis attempts to reflect on current world events, the social, political and economic developments; and the conflation of cultural Europe with the political and economic ideas behind the European Union, the focus still stays on the analysed works and their theoretical background. The disappointment over the dissolving vision of a united Europe has been emerging as an overall theme connecting the writers' works laid out in the chapters.

Chapter 1

Problems without a solution: Methodology in World Literature

‘Problems without a solution are exactly what we need in a field like ours, where we are used to asking only those questions for which we already have an answer’ (Moretti, *Graphs* 26).

Europe, especially when discussed in relation to world literature, is often referred to as an unambiguous cultural unity and presented as an unequivocal notion to deal with. My thesis explores the different meanings of Europe, the diverse interpretations of European identity by investigating the literary dialogue between Hungarian and British contemporary literature and so, in a much-generalized sense, in some aspects between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe. Although Europe and European identity might appear to be a popular and often discussed subject, in reality its literary interpretation is nearly a completely neglected research area, just as the literary dialogue between the Western and the Eastern parts of the European Union. While this gap in literary criticism provides the purpose and validity of my research, it also presents a scarcity of relevant researched materials and the lack of an exemplary methodological route as well. Although the research concentrates only on Europe, due to its comparative nature and the fact that it deals with two concerning their cultural positions and literary capitals very unequal countries its methodological background is provided by world literary approaches. The overview of some of the current world literary models provides different perspectives, and possible approaches and methodologies, whose combination forms the methodology most suited for this study. The other few researches done in this field provide additional viewpoints, issues and questions.

David Damrosch in his book *What Is World Literature?* (2003) aims to give an overview of the methodology of world literature as he claims ‘that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to individual works as to

bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike' (Damrosch, *What* 5). Damrosch's intention in this book is 'to explore this mode of circulation and to clarify the ways in which works of world literature can best be read' (5). His later book *How to Read World Literature* (2009) discusses 'a set of skills that we need to develop – or recover and hone – in order to read world literature with understanding and enjoyment' (Damrosch, *How* 4).

Damrosch points out that 'a work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural origin' (Damrosch, *What* 6). For Damrosch, however, world literature is not a stable entity but an ever-changing group of works as he states 'a given work can enter into world literature and then fall out of it again if it shifts beyond a threshold point along either axis, the literary or the worldly' (6). Moreover, world literature is not only changing during time but it is also different for every onlooker: 'at any given point, a work may function as world literature for some readers but not for others, and for some kinds of reading and not others' (6). He believes that the individual experience of a single reader is equally important and should be somehow taken into consideration. 'At any given time, a fluctuating number of foreign works will circulate actively within a culture, and a subset of these will be widely shared and enjoy a canonical status, but different groups within a society, and different individuals within any group, will create distinctive congeries of works, blending canonical and noncanonical works into effective microcanons' (298). The ever-changing nature of world literature in time is also expressed by the term 'shadow canon' introduced by Damrosch to complement hypercanon – 'the older "major" authors who have held their own or even gained ground over the past twenty years' –, and countercanon – 'the subaltern and "contestatory" voices of writers in languages less commonly taught and in minor literatures within great-power languages' (Damrosch, 'World' 45). Shadow canon consists of 'the old "minor" authors who fade increasingly into the background and are remembered only by the older scholarly generations (45). Damrosch writes concerning a work's place in world literature that 'the shifts a work may undergo […] do not reflect the unfolding of some internal logic of the work in itself but come about through often complex dynamics of cultural change and contestation' (Damrosch, *What* 6).

Casanova at the very beginning of her book *The World Republic of Letters* (2004) distances her project from other approaches to the study of world literature stating that she 'will speak not of world literature, but of international literary space, or else of the world republic of letters' as 'what needs to be described is not a contemporary state of the world of letters, but a long historical process through which international literature – literary creation, freed from its political and national dependencies – has progressively invented itself' (Casanova, *The World* xii). She describes the central hypothesis of the book: 'there exists a "literature-world", a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political division, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space' (xii). Moreover, 'its boundaries, its capitals, its highways, and its forms of communication do not completely coincide with those of the political and economic world' (11). She, however, admits the importance of the 'contacts between writers, musicians, and painters […], the conjunction of several types of artistic capital that works to enrich each one of them' (16).

Franco Moretti, like Casanova, focuses on the unequal nature of world literature but he concentrates rather on the changes of literary forms than on the artistic and literary difficulties and strategies of writers, as Casanova does. In his influential but controversial article 'Conjectures on World Literature' (2000) he argues that while there is one world literature 'or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures)', this system is profoundly unequal 'with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality' (Moretti, 'Conjectures' 2).[7] Moretti's 'one and unequal' world-literary system has obviously influenced the 'combined and uneven development' theory of world literature of the Warwick Research Collective's (WReC) *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (2015), however, they at many points disagree with his work. (WReC 55-57). While they share his emphasis on cultural imperialism and 'the broad tendency in terms of which core modes and forms superimpose themselves on and overwrite peripheral ones, 'interfering' with their autonomous development and producing 'sameness'

[7] Moretti has refined his argument in the article 'More Conjectures' (2003) and in his book *Distant Reading* (2013).

across the core/periphery divide', they highlight 'the existence of a counter-current' (56).

While for Damrosch only works which enter international circulation are considered world literature, for Casanova and even more for Moretti and the WReC world literature encompasses all literary works of every nation. Casanova, however, focuses on these works' success in the international market, while Moretti is truly interested in embracing each piece of world literature, including mass, low, bad and even already forgotten literature. In this sense Moretti starts from the national and also investigates how certain national literatures are influenced by other literatures, while not necessarily exerting any influence themselves. The WReC takes Casanova's system further in conceiving world-literature 'through its mediation by and registration of the modern world-system' (WReC 9) For them world-literature is an 'analytical category', a 'methodological framework' in which the 'idea of combined and uneven development works in the literary realm' (49, 51). They reject the comparison of literary works based on 'any abstract connectivity linking them across time and place' as it is often the case, according to them, when world-literature is perceived in value terms but they believe that 'world-literature' is 'a creature of modernity' (49). They 'prefer to speak then not of literary forms spreading or unfolding across empty time […] but of forms that are brought into being (and often into collision with other, pre-existing forms) through the long waves of the capitalisation of the world – not of *modernism* (or even *modernisms*) but of the *dialectics of core and periphery* that underpin all cultural production in the modern era' (50-51). They place themselves in stark contrast with Damrosch's concept that is 'self-consciously indifferent to historicity' and exclude any work produced in earlier times from their system (50).

As Damrosch focuses on the differences between the cultural interpretations of world literature and the individual cases of how certain literary works travel, he does not aim to give an overall picture of world literature as Moretti, Casanova and the WReC attempt to do. Damrosch believes that 'world literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures' as he argues that 'with the possible exception of a few irreducibly multinational works like *The Thousand and One Nights*, virtually all literary works are born within what we would now call a national literature' and

‘even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures’ (Damrosch, *What* 282, 283).

Casanova, however, emphasises the fictional and invented character of the literary world. She uses Ezra Pound’s idea of ‘literary credit’, the ‘acquired value in the literary market place’ attached to the name of a writer, which is ‘the power and authority granted to a writer by virtue of the belief that he has earned his “name”; it is therefore what he believes himself to have, and what others believe him to have, and consequently the power to which it is agreed he is entitled’ (Casanova, *The World* 16, 17). ‘The existence, at once concrete and abstract, of this literary capital […] is therefore possible only by virtue of the very belief that sustains it and of the real and tangible effects of this belief, which supports the functioning of the entire literary world’ (17). All participants have in common a belief in the value of this asset and it is ‘universally recognized as the necessary and sufficient condition of taking part in literary competition’ and for the possession of this literary capital, ‘at once concrete and abstract’, ‘everyone is prepared to struggle’ (17). In her opinion, this makes it ‘possible to measure literary practices against a standard that is universally recognized as legitimate’ and the effects of literary capital can be measured in the ‘immense profit that writers from literarily impoverished spaces have obtained […] from being published and recognized in the major centers’ (17). This dual nature of literary capital is not only true in the case of writers but also concerning national literatures and literary capitals. ‘The existence of a literary center is […] twofold: it exists both in the imaginations of those who inhabit it and in the reality of the measurable effects it produces’ (24). Casanova’s ‘purpose in analyzing the world republic of letters is not to describe all of the world’s literature, still less to propose an exhaustive and equally impossible critical reading of it’ (4). The aim of the book is ‘to bring about a change of perspective’ of ordinary criticism and ‘to show that the laws that govern this strange and immense republic – a world of rivalry, struggle, and inequality – help illuminate in often radically new ways even the most widely discussed works’ (4). The WReC feel that Casanova abstracts ‘too strongly from the world of politics: she tends to treat the “literature-world” and the “everyday-world” a little too much as parallel universes’ (WReC 9). Their focus falls much more directly on these two worlds’ intersection and relationship (9).

Moretti believes that 'forms are the abstract of social relationship: so, formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power' (Moretti, 'Conjectures' 4). 'Deducing from the form of an object the forces that have been at work: this is the most elegant definition ever of what literary sociology should be' (Moretti, *Graphs* 57). So for him comparative morphology ('the systematic study of how forms vary in space and time') discovers 'how symbolic *power* varies from place to place' (Moretti, 'Conjectures' 4). He claims that sociological formalism has always been his interpretive method and he considers it 'particularly appropriate for world literature' (4). In 'The Soul and the Harpy' Moretti, to explain sociological formalism, quotes Lukács who 'had come to formulate the problem we are concerned with in terms that still remain valid today' (Moretti, *Signs* 10):

> The greatest errors of sociological analysis in relation to art are: in artistic creations it seeks and examines only contents, tracing a straight line between these and given economic relations. But in literature what is truly social is form … Form is social reality, it participates vivaciously in the life of the spirit. It therefore does not operate only as a factor acting upon life and moulding experiences, but also as a factor which is in its turn moulded by life. (Lukács cited in Moretti, *Signs* 10)

Moretti, however, believes that what prevented Lukács from pursuing sociological formalism and what has hindered literary criticism ever since is the insistence on the purity of form and the avoidance of the concept of convention. Moretti believes that convention is a crucial concept in the analysis of culture because 'it indicates when a form has taken definitive social root, entering into daily life, innervating and organizing it in ways increasingly undetected and regular – and hence more effective. But it is at the same time a concept which enforces a harsh disillusionment, because it strips historical existence of its openness to change, and aesthetic form of its pristine purity' (Moretti, *Signs* 12). Moretti argues for 're-routing the tasks of literary histography and the image of literature itself, enclosing them both in the idea of consent, stability, repetition, bad taste even. It means, in other words, turning the ultimate paradise – the paradise of 'beauty' – into a social institution like the others' (12). Moretti emphasises the importance of studying 'the mass conventions, the great ideological agreements by which each

age is distinguished from others' (14). This inclusive aspect of Moretti's approach is even clearer in his recent 'computational criticism' work.

As opposed to Moretti who wants to open up world literature for every piece of writing, the limitation Damrosch introduces is that 'world literature is writing that gains in translation' ruling out 'informative texts', which 'neither gain or lose in a good translation'; works that 'are so inextricably connected to their original language and moment that they really cannot be effectively translated at all'; and works whose 'cultural assumptions don't travel' (Damrosch, *What* 281, 288-289). He states that 'works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range' (289). 'Travelling abroad […] text does indeed change, both in its frame reference and usually in language as well', in an excellent translation, 'the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening* of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text' (292). Damrosch focuses on the problems of cultural and linguistic difference that arise during translation and by attending to the possible solutions and choices he emphasises the importance of reading in awareness of the translators' biases, as this awareness furthers not only the understanding of the text but also the workings of the involved cultures.

While promoting the cooperation with national experts Moretti does not appear to enter the theoretical discussion on translation, the WReC emphasise that translation is 'inextricably bound up with cultural misinterpretation, linguistic domination and social inequality' (WReC 26). At the same time they point out that not only translation but even reading are social processes and they urge to consider 'the full range of social practices implicated: writing as commodity labour, the making of books, publishing and marketing, the social 'fate' of a publication (reviews, criticism, the search for, creation and cultivation of a readership, etc.) (28). In the same vein Casanova feels that translation is

> the foremost example of a particular type of consecration in the literary world […][since] it constitutes the principal means of access to the literary world for all writers outside the center. Translation is the major prize and weapon in international literary competition, an instrument whose use and purpose differ depending on the position of the translator with respect to the text translated – that is, on the relation

> between what are commonly called “source” and “target” languages. (Casanova, *The World* 133)

Casanova considers translation ambiguous as ‘on the one hand, it is a means of obtaining official entry to the republic of letters; and on the other, it is a way of systematically imposing the categories of the center upon works from the periphery, even of unilaterally deciding the meaning of such works’ (154). Casanova warns that ‘the great consecrating nations reduce foreign works of literature to their own categories of perception, which they mistake for universal norms, while neglecting all the elements of historical, cultural, political, and especially literary context that makes it possible to properly and fully appreciate such works’ (154).

There is another form of consecration: literary prizes, which are the least literary but often the most powerful, as they are ‘responsible mainly for making the verdicts of the sanctioning organs of the republic of letters known beyond its borders. As the most apparent of the mechanisms of consecration, they represent a sort of confirmation for the benefit of the general public’ (146-147). Literary prizes work on the basis that ‘the most independent territories of the literary world are able to state their own law, to lay down the specific standards and principles applied by their internal hierarchies, and to evaluate works and pronounce judgements without regard for political and national divisions’ (86). Casanova’s belief that among other literarily autonomous countries ‘French literary space, having imposed itself as universal, was adopted as a model: not insofar as it was French, but insofar as it was autonomous – which is to say purely literary’ is founded on one of the basic principles of her model that ‘it is this very capacity for being universalized, or denationalized, that allows varying degrees of autonomy among literary spaces to be recognized’ (87). This might also serve as an argument against Damrosch’s criticism of Casanova’s book which he thinks ‘might be better titled *La République parisienne des letters*’, as he accuses her of ‘implicit triumphalism’ and claims that as an ‘unsatisfactory account of world literature in general, Casanova’s book is actually a good account of the operation of world literature within the modern French context’ (Damrosch, *What* 27). Damrosch’s offhand criticism presented as footnote is readjusted slightly in his later book *How*

to Read World Literature, where he refers to her book only with a minor correction. In the chapter called 'Going Global' he analyses the effects of economic and cultural globalization and observes that as literature 'now circulates in multiple directions' –compared to the one-way flow in the older imperial networks –, 'writers even in very small countries can aspire to reach a global readership', but only with the help of the key centers of publication: Paris, London and New York (Damrosch, *How* 106). He states that 'as Pascale Casanova has agued in *The World Republic of Letters*, writers from peripheral regions typically need to be embraced by publishers and opinion makers in such centers if they are to reach an international audience' (106). Damrosch, however, immediately remarks without any notes on Casanova's notion of subcentres that 'yet many works find multiple publishers at the Frankfurt Book Fair, an annual event not tied to any former imperial capital' (106).

In contrast to Casanova, Moretti and WReC, who emphasise the unequal nature of the international circulation of literature, Damrosch is much more optimistic about its effects on the works. He argues that as a literary work 'moves into the sphere of world literature, far from inevitably suffering a loss of authenticity or essence, a work can gain in many ways', as being read only in one language and within one culture 'exerts a powerful limiting force on the variability of readerly response' (Damrosch, *What* 6). The perpetual debate on the real essence of literature naturally arises but Damrosch believes that even those elements of a literary work that 'cannot be directly reproduced in the new language can often be conveyed at a different level of the text' (293).

Damrosch claims that in order to follow the process when a work moves into the sphere of world literature 'it is necessary to look closely at the transformation a work undergoes in particular circumstances, which is why this book highlights the issues of circulation and translation and focuses on detailed case studies throughout. To understand the workings of world literature, we need more a phenomenology than an ontology of the work of art: a literary work *manifests* differently abroad than it does at home' (6). Unlike Moretti or Casanova, Damrosch does not consider world literature as a total whole but as an ever-changing set of works and way of circulation interpreted differently both on individual and cultural levels. He claims that, 'world literature itself is constituted very differently in

different cultures', as 'a culture's norms and needs profoundly shape the selection of works that enter into it as world literature, influencing the ways they are translated, marketed and read' (26). In his approach he aims to pay 'close attention to the workings of a given cultural system, at a scale of analysis that also allows for extended discussion of specific works' (26). From the examples presented in Damrosch's books his methodology seems to be following the life of a given literary work after it entered world literature paying close attention to the workings of both the source and the target cultures. With Roland Green's words Damrosch's critical outlook might produce 'multiple, complementary, but not entirely compatible close readings – say, of the work in its local setting and then again as a specimen of world literature' (Greene 216). John Prizer in his article entitled 'Toward a Productive Interdisciplinary Relationship: Between Comparative Literature and World Literature', in which he attempts to present an overview of the differences and similarities of these two methodological fields in the past and in the present, states that Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* is 'unique among scholarly works in its effort to actually "follow the international circulation" of works across time and space as mediated by politics, commerce, competing efforts at translation, and archaeology (Prizer 11). According to Prizer, in Damrosch's view 'world literature is actually improved by translation when it internationalizes the works' mode of circulation and challenges different cultures across time to transnational, transethnic hermeneutic dialogue' (11).

Casanova proposes 'a new tool for the reading and interpretation of literary texts that may be at once, and without any contradiction, internal (textual) and external (historical)', a method 'which consists chiefly in situating a work on the basis of its position in world literary space' (Casanova, *The World* xii). She also believes that one has to 'step away from a particular text in order to examine it in relation to other texts, to try to detect similarities and dissimilarities between them and look for recurring patterns' (3). She argues that 'everything that is written, everything that is translated, published, theorized, commented upon, celebrated - all these things are so many elements of a vast composition. A literary work can be deciphered only on the basis of the whole of the composition, for its rediscovered coherence stands revealed only in relation to the entire literary universe of which it is a part' (3). 'In trying to characterize a writer's work, one must situate it with

respect to two things: the place occupied by his native literary space within world literature and his own position within this space' (41).

At the same time 'very different literary temporalities (and therefore aesthetics and theories) may be found in a given national space, with the result that not infrequently one finds writers who are nearer to one quite distant in geographical terms than to writers of their own generation and nationality who share the same culture and the same language' (101). According to Casanova the temporal and geographical discrepancies between the positions of contemporary writers in the literary world 'explain the difficulties that specialists in comparative literature face in trying to establish transnational periodization' (101). Casanova argues that her model of world literary space 'because it is not constructed according to evolutionary principles, makes it possible to compare writers who are not contemporary in the usual sense with reference to a measure of literary time that is relatively independent of the political chronologies that for the most part still organize histories of literature' (101). Casanova believes that one can observe consequences of literary domination; and aesthetic and literary solutions, which are employed by writers occupying a dominated or a peripheral position, that are everywhere the same, 'that are exerted in every place and in every period in identical fashion, and that furnish universal (or almost universal) insights for understanding literary texts' (176). Casanova believes that it is possible to construct a "generative" model capable of reproducing the infinite series of the solutions of writers 'on the basis of a limited number of literary, stylistic, and essentially political possibilities' and in this way 'to uncover unsuspected links between writers whose affinity is suggested by neither stylistic analysis nor national literary histories' (177).

While 'ordinarily, writers are classified by nation, genre, epoch, language, literary movement, and so on; or one chooses not to classify them all, preferring to celebrate the "miracle" of absolute singularity', 'the consideration of literary works on an international scale leads to the discovery of further principles of contiguity or differentiation that makes it possible to associate works that are not usually thought of as being related and sometimes to separate ones that are customarily grouped together, thus bringing out neglected properties' (178). The WReC also abandons 'any abstract connectivity linking them across time and space' but suggests

considering texts together which ‘bear testimony – in their own distinct ways, and in both their form and their content – to the “shock of the new”, the massive rupture effected at the levels of space-time continuum, lifeworld, experience, and human sensorium by capitalist modernisation’ (WReC 50).

One of Moretti’s quests is to turn literary history and criticism, especially the study of world literature, into a proper science. He promotes distant reading, a reading that is ‘second hand’: a patchwork of other people’s research, *without a single direct textual reading*’ (Moretti, ‘Conjectures’ 2). This in practice means that a world literary scholar analyses other researchers’ analyses, which he at the end synthesizes into a system. Already when writing, Moretti was well aware of the opposition his suggested approach would bring about and pointed out that as world literature inherently looks beyond the canon, if only because it tackles hundreds of literatures and languages, it cannot use the methodology of close reading, which is designed to focus on an extremely limited number of literary works. Distant reading, however, ‘is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems’ (2). He argues that ‘if we understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it’s precisely this ‘poverty’ that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know.’ ‘Inevitably, the larger the field one wants to study, the greater the need for abstract ‘instruments’ capable of mastering empirical reality’ (2, 5).

At this point, however, close reading had not been really lost: what Moretti argued was that it is not the task of the researchers of world literature as they leave this kind of research for researchers interested in national literatures and ones working on traditional comparative literary criticism. As he states ‘probably, no matter what the object of analysis is, there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature, in a sort of cosmic and inevitable division of labour’ (4). Referring to the two basic cognitive metaphors: the tree and the wave, - when while ‘the tree describes the passage from unity to diversity’, ‘the wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity’ - Moretti claims that ‘cultural history is made of trees *and* waves’ and ‘as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its literature and

products are inevitably composite ones' (4). The basis for the division of labour between national and world literature is that 'national literature, for people who see trees; world literature, for people who see waves. Division of labour […] and challenge; because both metaphors work, yes but that doesn't mean that they work equally well. The products of cultural history are always composite ones: but which is the dominant mechanism in their composition? The internal, or the external one? The nation or the world? The tree or the wave?' (5). Moreover, Moretti confesses that in order to test his example he did read some novels, but he justifies this by claiming that this kind of 'reading' 'no longer produces interpretations but merely *tests* them: it's not the beginning of the critical enterprise, but its appendix. And then, here you don't really read the *text* anymore, but rather through the text, looking for your unit of analysis. The task is constrained from the start; it is reading without freedom' (7).

In his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005), where he takes his methodology much further than even in 'Conjectures', he describes distant reading 'where distance is however not an obstacle, but *a specific form of knowledge*: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models' (Moretti, *Graphs* 1). When talking about the enormous difference between the amount of all published works and the canon he claims that close reading is not effective, and 'it's not even a matter of time, but of method: a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it *isn't* a sum of individual cases: it's a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole' (4). Moretti's other argument to include mass literature in literary criticism is that 'the implicit belief that literature proceeds from one canonical form to the next, in a sort of unbroken thread' is not valid, as 'modern literature follows a more oblique and discontinuous path' (Moretti, *Atlas* 148).

'Quantitative work is truly *cooperation*: not only in the pragmatic sense that it takes forever to gather the data, but because such data are ideally independent from any individual researcher, and can thus be shared by others, and combined in more than one way' (Moretti, *Graphs* 4). 'The quantitative approach to literature can take several different forms – from computational stylistics to thematic databases, book history, and more' (4). Moretti uses graphs, maps and trees to

focus on forms in *Graphs*, but utilizes network theory in order to include plot in the computational analysis of literature (Moretti, 'Network').

Damrosch criticises Moretti's approach to world literary criticism presented in 'Conjectures' claiming that although 'deep structures could be elucidated […] literary effects are often achieved by highly individualistic means, and generative grammars of narrative had difficulty providing much insight into works more elaborate than folktales or detective stories. As with texts, so with cultures at large: individual cultures only partly lend themselves to analysis of common global patterns' (Damrosch, *What* 26). Damrosch argues that 'systemic approaches need to be counterbalanced with close attention to particular languages, specific texts' and proposes his approach which pays equal attention to 'global systematicity and infinite textual multiplicity' (26). In his book *Atlas of the European Novel* Moretti combines book history with the history of forms using quantitative analysis and studying the 'horizontal' divisions of the literary market among different places. When introducing his quantitative method he admits that his object

> as in all serial history […] is an artificial one, because a series is never 'found', but always constructed – and constructed by focusing on what is *repeatable* and can therefore turn discrete objects into a series. And this is, of course, what makes quantitative methods so repugnant to literary critics: the fear that they may suppress the uniqueness of texts. Which indeed they do. But as I don't believe in the epistemological value of the unique, its suppression doesn't really bother me. (Moretti, *Atlas* 143)

Damrosch believes that 'world literature is not an immense body of material that must somehow, impossibly, be mastered; it is a mode of reading that can be experienced *intensively* with a few works just as effectively as it can be explored *extensively* with a large number' (Damrosch, *What* 299). This is the major point where Damrosch and Moretti disagree, and this disagreement makes it nearly impossible to contrast their approaches, which, however, does not mean that their combination would not work. Damrosch himself states that

> it points toward a much larger set of research opportunities, if we combine close analysis of individual texts with the study of "wave patterns" of the spread of genres like the short story, in the manner advocated by Franco

> Moretti. Such comparisons are almost unknown once we move beyond a single national tradition or the trade routes of a colonial empire, and they can do much to illuminate hypercanonical and countercanonical authors alike. Such conjunctions can also ease the problems of audience faced by anyone who wants to work on either sort of author. (Damrosch, 'World' 51)

Roland Greene gave the expressive title 'Not Works but Networks' to his essay in the book *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006), the 'multivocal report' on 'the state of the discipline' (Saussy viii, vii). Greene turning around the conversation about the crisis in the discipline defined by the search for its proper subject suggests celebrating the fact that comparative literature 'remains the one area in literary studies that has no object in the sense of a corpus, a set of languages, or a normative method' (Greene 214). As he summarises:

> the discipline concerns itself with the exchanges out of which literatures are made: the economies of knowledge, social relations, power, and especially art that make literatures possible. Naturally, if one undertakes to address literatures comparatively – that is, with the negotiations that construct them in the foreground, emphasizing their constructedness – one must posit something of each literature in itself as well as of literature in general. One must interpret particular novels, employ received concepts, narrate literary histories. But those acts are merely the means that direct us to the end of comparative literature, which is to issue fresh accounts of literatures under negotiation. The available modes of evoking such negotiations change from time to time […] All of these approaches seem especially revelatory for as long as they give us fresh entry into literatures under negotiation; by the same lights, most of them lose explanatory power over time because they come to be about literature as already negotiated - about works in themselves, settled terminologies, and predictable results. Means come to be mistaken for ends, […] and the work overwrites the network that gives it power. […]The drive of the comparatist is to remain committed […] to recovering that dynamic event of negotiation: how literatures and all their elements come into being out of a process of exchange. (Greene 2006, 214-215)

In accordance with this belief Greene sees David Damrosch's and Franco Moretti's, according to him, 'differing and perhaps incompatible accounts of world literature as both negotiational models' (Greene 216). Greene expresses his opinion that 'both Moretti and Damrosch invested in models of literary studies that emphasize the negotiations that establish literariness over the seeming autonomy

and self-sufficiency of the works that result from that process. […] At the same time they recognize the negotiated character of literariness in stark contrast to each other, Damrosh proposing that we acknowledge literary networks by adding a dimension to our interpretative procedure, Moretti suggesting we do the same by subtraction' (216-217).

Greene also draws attention to Rey Chow's contrasting models of comparative literary criticism. Her view on the attitude of critics carries many similarities with Casanova's system of world literature. Chow called the older model 'Europe and Its Others':

> In this formulation, the rationale for comparing hinges on the conjunction *and*; the *and* […] signals a form of supplementation that authorizes the first term, Europe, as the grid of reference, to which may be added others in a subsequent and subordinate fashion. An outcome of this kind of comparison is an often asymmetrical distribution of cultural capital and intellectual labour, so that cultures of Europe (the grid), such as French and German, tend to be studied with meticulousness while cultures on the margins of Europe, such as those in Latin America, Africa, or Asia, even when they are differentiated by unique, mutually unintelligible linguistic traditions, may simply be considered examples of the same geographical areas (and hence not warranting comparative study). (Chow 294)

Chow's second model carries the label 'Post-European Culture and the West', when writing about critics from – using Casanova's term – 'the periphery' she summarises:

> No longer simply a spontaneous act […] comparison is understood by these critics as a type of discursive situation, involuntarily brought into play by and inextricable from the conditions of modern world politics– a discursive situation that in the end does not quite conform to classical comparative aspirations. Unlike the old-fashioned comparative literature based on Europe, none of these studies in question vociferously declares its own agenda as international or cosmopolitan; to the contrary, each is firmly located within a specific cultural framework. Yet, in their very cultural specificities, these studies nonetheless come across as transcultural, with implications that resonate well beyond their individual locations. (Chow 301)

While in the names of her categories Chow treats Europe as a unit, in her essay she makes a distinction between the powerful Western Europe and its margins using Greek literature as an example. Despite this the WReC find problematic 'the persistent slippage in her commentary between geo-historical and ideological categories – "European" on the one hand, "Eurocentric" on the other' and the consequent effect of 'homogenising "Europe", mystifying its "internal" history and flattening out the unevenness of its "internal" development' (WReC 40-41). They reject her model as idealist since she reasons 'as though it were possible to achieve the "provincialisation" of Europe in the absence of any plausible account of understanding of what has grounded and enabled "European" dominance over the course of the past five hundred years' (41). They argue that 'the idea of a new comparativism in literary studies only makes sense in the context of an overarching theory of the (capitalist) world-system' (41).

Referring to the notion of global circulation of literature, Christopher L. Hill claims that Moretti's and Casanova's theories are bound up with the logic of departures and arrivals, while 'studies of world literature should focus on the conditions of travel', as 'the most important encounters happen on the road' (Hill 1, 7). He observes that 'Moretti, in explaining the diffusion of the European novel, emphasizes its interaction with 'local' narrative forms upon arrival, while Casanova sketches an international field, centered on France, in which writers in peripheral nations adopt European forms to gain prestige' (1). Using the example of the history of the naturalist novel in the world he proves the existence of 'multiple, overlapping histories that make up the heterogeneous planetary history of the form', that 'naturalism's movement was aided by its association with non-fictional genres and that through travel' unexpected transformations occur' (1).

When turning to researches focused on the literary dialogue between Eastern and Western side of Europe the most prominent and influential attempt in this field seems to be Nataša Kovačević's book *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization* (2008). In her book she convincingly proves the adequacy of using post-colonial terminology to examine the relationship between Eastern Europe and Western Europe. While accepting arguments emphasising 'the absence of "real" colonies or the various imperialist institutions, discourses, or people implicated in their rule' in Eastern Europe, she

takes the viewpoint of Larry Wolff that ‘as in the case of Orientalism, so also with Eastern Europe, intellectual discovery and mastery could not be entirely separated from the possibility of real conquest’ and argues that ‘this “intellectual discovery and mastery” of Eastern Europe is always-already implicated in the political, economic, and cultural interactions between the West and the East’ (Kovačević 3). She directs the attention to

> a long history of Western attempts to identify Western Europe as enlightened, developed, and civilized in distinction to Eastern Europe and, as a result, to intellectually master Eastern Europe through description and classification, fixing it into stereotypes of lamentable cultural, political, and economic backwardness […] or, alternately, praiseworthy conservation of its “noble savages”. (2)

However, as she states, she shifts

> the focus of study from Western narratives that map this locale to Eastern European narratives which are haunted by these same discourses […] This preoccupation of Eastern Europeans with their various reflections in the Western mirror and concomitant self-stigmatization or self-celebrations are perhaps the most elusive and least discussed avatars of what could be called, for lack of a better theoretical term, Eastern European Orientalism. (4)

In accordance with this focus in the whole book she treats the western side of the Orientalist discourse as well-established and when needed extra justification she seems to rely rather on the political and economic approach and behaviour of the West than the actual cultural phenomena. While this is perfectly justified by her argument mentioned above that ‘the intellectual discovery and mastery” is implicated in and also generates the political and economic attitude, the lack of even brief mentioning of Western European literary texts is somehow curious during the close readings and analyses of Eastern literary texts.

The main and only exception is the chapter ‘Deviant stepchild of European history, Communist Eastern Europe in Milan Kundera and Günter Grass’ where she brilliantly identifies that both Kundera, who emigrated from Czechoslovakia to France, and Grass, from the former West Germany, ‘employ historicist narratives of Europe’s progress toward an enlightened modernity and resulting fulfilment of

liberal-democratic ideals, which allow them to Orientalize communism as a non-European aberration and a non-modern obstacle to the linear trajectory of European development' (83). As the previous chapters were dealing with three Eastern-European émigré writers, Vladimir Nabokov, who emigrated from Russia (via Berlin) to North America, Joseph Brodsky, from Russia to North America, and Czesław Miłosz, from Poland to America, she does not clearly explain why she shifts her focus back to Western Europe and makes an exception with Günter Grass, and so making him somehow the representative of all Western Europe while at the same time downplaying Grass's Western European position in the Western Eastern-European Orientalist opposition.

In the following chapters she mentions numerous Western writers who deal with Eastern-European subjects in their writings, but nearly all of whom are from the United States. As her book puts her post-colonial methodology into practice and she deals intelligently with several sensitive issues in relation to the many different Eastern-European countries and pays so much attention to details, it is interesting that she does not seem to need to differentiate in the Western side of the discourse, and at the expense of the equally diverse Western European side she treats the United States of America as the main representative of the West.

Kovačević made great use of Larry Wolff's book *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, which tells the history of the 'mental mapping' of Europe from Western perspectives (Wolff 14). Wolff also describes the intellectual construction of Central Europe and this thesis cannot avoid dealing with the problem of further border-drawing activities, in addition to the Western and Eastern Europe division, either. As Kovačević pointed out, 'as in the case with Eastern Europe, the borders of central Europe and the Balkans (or the non-Central Eastern Europe?) shift depending on the account' (Kovačević 10). This is not so much the problem of 'a definition of clear borders', but 'the political and cultural overdetermination of concepts such as Central Europe and the Balkans' (10). The notion of a division between a 'second' or 'Central' Europe – 'a redeemable Eastern Europe' – and a 'third' Europe, the Balkans – 'an irredeemable extreme and problematic Eastern Europe' –, although completely arbitrary, is equally influential in 'Central' European culture and thinking as it is in

Western Europe (10). The position of the post-Soviet states and Turkey is also full of political and cultural controversies.

'Theory used as a methodology […] has gained supremacy over literature' warns Gordana Crnković in her book *Imagined Dialogues: Eastern-European Literature in Conversation with American and English Literature* (2000), which is the only other work concentrating on the literary dialogue between Eastern and Western Europe I have been able to find so far but which adopts a point of view diametrically opposed to Kovačević's (Crnković 9). She argues that 'theory is often turned into a premade conceptual framework through which one views literature' and that current literary criticism 'only applies the already existent concepts to the text' 'instead of activating the potential of literature to actually say something new' (10, 7). She promotes a criticism that asks – 'fully aware of the previous historical research – new questions about the freedom of literary works and about the things they do outside of their immediate historical contexts and concerns' (6). Her book focuses 'not on the pregiven concepts of oppositionality and subversion, […] but rather on what literary works themselves articulate as limiting and liberating' (10). Being interested in the liberating potential of literature she introduces a kind of reading that is making dialogues: 'travelling freely across space and time, and making connections among literary works of various national origins, connections that do not have to have confirmation in "facts" outside of the particular act of reading' (126). The three 'imagined' literary dialogues in her book tried to find connections in 'what literary works themselves articulate as closures and liberating practices of language, power and gender', as she believes that 'the creation of imagined dialogues can enrich us immensely' by helping us 'to get out of our own way of seeing the world and therefore enlarge our potential of both thinking and acting differently, or recognize or confirm our own thoughts or actions' (126-127).

Another book which is concerned with the Eastern and Western cultural division in Europe is *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture* (2010) edited by Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker and Sissy Helff. As Korte summarises, the volume 'unites contributors with "Western" and "Eastern" backgrounds' and sets out to consider not only the change that East-West relations have undergone after the end of the Cold War but also 'the continuities of meaning(s) which the East – a notoriously shifting signifier

– has long had for the West' (Korte 1). The studies presented in the volume reveal that the East portrayed in British culture often 'is a space not only to be re-discovered, but also a mirror-space that helps the West to complement and destabilise its conceptions about itself, its stereotypes about the East, and its ideas about Europe and the European cultural heritage' (4).

The Novel and Europe: Imagining the Continent in Post-1945 Fiction (2016) is the book which has articulated very similar aims to those of my thesis. The editor Andrew Hammond, who has been extensively researching both the British and American representations of the Balkans, has recently turned his attention also to creating a global dialogue, first with the volume entitled *Global Cold War Literature: Western, Eastern and Postcolonial Perspectives* (2012) edited by him. *The Novel and Europe* brings together scholars from around the globe analysing how the European theme has been represented in literature. As Hammond explains, the volume has emerged 'from the need for a more comparative approach in research and teaching, one that draws together cultural heritages without suggesting cultural unanimity and that explores how writers have risen above the national context to debate the continent's division, hierarchies, belongings and exclusions' (Hammond, 'Introduction' 2). He envisions the study of literature in Europe as being 'extended to any text that speaks about continental realities' in a field that would not only include all 'the recognised and partly recognised nations' of Europe and would 'combine texts written in global languages with those in regional or local languages', but would also 'draw in literatures both from the former colonies and from those few global territories unvanquished by western empires' (6).

In *The Novel and Europe* Hammond identifies four techniques 'how a subject as vast as Europe may be accommodated in a single novel': the first is 'the exchange of a single national setting for a narrative that ranges through much of Europe', the second is 'the use of a particular textual feature – a character, a historical event, a geographical location – as a metonym for the wider continent' (23). The third technique is 'the method of exploring Europe through textual reflections on European literature' and the final one is 'the use of continental symbols at points in a narrative which ostensibly focuses on a single nation, thus repositioning it, if only momentarily, in the wider geopolitical context' (24). The 16 novels under study by scholars from around the globe in the volume represent in

Hammond's view only a preliminary step in and towards an internationalist debate out of which 'may come all manner of insight into how the exclusivity of EU discourse can be challenged and how the lived experience of Europe, in all its variety, can be more fully understood' (35).

Each of the above mentioned excellent collections attempted to be as inclusive and sensitive as possible about their choice of contributors and the analysed works, identified their own logic of selection and organisation, and admitted their limitations due to space, time and accessibility. Despite their laudable intentions one cannot escape the feeling of unease about a probably unavoidable randomness, which my thesis also shares in a much larger scale and which is taking me back to the admiration of Moretti's pursuit to turn literary history and criticism, especially the study of world literature, into a proper science. While I am very much influenced by and would desire to put into practice Franco Moretti's model of distant reading concentrating on literary forms and content if only on the scale of European literature, as my research is concerned with contemporary literature and explores a quite neglected area of study, I was restricted to follow in his footsteps only by applying some principles of his model. I tried to concentrate on the norms rather than only the exceptions of literature: namely by opening up my investigation from canonical works to popular, even bad literature, especially as these categories might alter travelling through the borders of different countries. Last but not least I aimed to contribute to the knowledge of European, and also British and Hungarian, society by the analysis of their literature.

Casanova's model of the world republic of letters encourages viewing national literatures and literary works as elements of the entire literary universe and so focusing on their connections while keeping in mind their different positions concerning their literary credits. Her emphasis on the 'at once concrete and abstract' character of the literary world and its effects on writers, literary markets and literatures draws attention to the very act of this invention, as well. When concentrating on the actual literary works engaged with European culture and identity I used Pascale Casanova's interpretative method – at once internal (textual) and external (historical) combining the close analyses of literary works and the examination of the conditions and influences under which the texts were produced.

Despite my intentions to refine my methodology with David Damrosch's approach of investigating the ways a literary work enters and functions at home in contrast to when becoming part of world literature with the aim of exploring the hidden norms and needs of the British and Hungarian cultures, I could carry it out only in the case of Imre Kertész,. On the one hand, no works from the other selected Hungarian authors have been translated into English, so they are virtually unknown in Britain. On the other hand, although Aldiss's six novels and many short-stories have been published in Hungarian, they did not attract much critical attention presumably due to their science-fiction background. Only one of Parks's novels has come out in Hungary (*Medici Money*) and Lewycka's three translated novels seem to have been left out of the Hungarian critical focus and considered as 'thoughtful beach books' (banza). Kertész, however, officially became part of the world canon with his consecration by the Nobel Prize and the investigation of this literary prize's effects on the writer not only helps to understand literary power relations but also assists in understanding the accepted literary preferences and norms in Europe.

Chapter 2

The Ethical Zero Ground for Europe

Although most of Imre Kertész's fictional works are set in Hungary and give accurate pictures of the different phases of the country's history, they never focus on local details or historical facts but on depicting the real nature of the circumstances, the underlying forces and the individual responses. Kertész expressed his hope that not only in *Fatelessness*, which tells the experiences of a boy in Auschwitz in a historically accurate way, but in his other novels as well, he had succeeded in making Auschwitz and also its legacy 'into a universal human experience' (Kertész, *Dossier* 108). He considered Auschwitz not as a 'singularly Jewish affair', but as 'a world experience, a European trauma' (Kertész, 'A száműzött' 289). He argued, 'Auschwitz did not take place in a vacuum, but in the Western culture, the Western civilization, and this civilization is just as much a survivor of Auschwitz' as the real survivors are (289). In the flames of Auschwitz 'everything that we had respected as European values was destroyed, and on this ethical zero ground, in this moral and spiritual darkness the only starting point appears to be what had created this darkness: the Holocaust' (289).

Kertész described his life and work: 'I have endeavoured – perhaps it is not sheer self-deception – to perform the existential labour that being an Auschwitz survivor has thrust upon me as a kind of obligation' (Kertész, 'Banquet'). This obligation of bearing witness manifests itself in the fact that 'his works return unremittingly' to the experience of Auschwitz (The Swedish Academy, 'The Nobel'). Moreover, for Imre Kertész, as Shoshana Felman proved for Camus, 'the literature of testimony […] is not only a statement, […] but a performative engagement between consciousness and history', which 'obliges artists […] to transform words into events and to make an act of every publication' (Felman 143). Each of Kertész's writings, as it was described in the Nobel Prize Presentation Speech by Torgny Lindgren, is 'intimately connected to one of the other works in his literary production, […] the separate parts appear to have grown together, with common root fibres or circulatory systems' (Lingren). Kertész liked to imagine his novels as

musical compositions, and the reader can listen to the recurring linguistic and conceptual motives not only in the separate books but also in the whole body of his work (Kertész, *Dossier* 125).

Writing about Auschwitz, however, means, as Elie Wiesel described, writing 'against words', telling 'less so as to make the truth more credible. […] what he [the artist] hopes to transmit can never be transmitted. All he can possibly hope to achieve is to communicate the impossibility of communication' (Wiesel 8). Giorgio Agamben sees 'this discrepancy' as 'the very structure of testimony' (Agamben 12). 'On the one hand, what happened in the camps appears to the survivors as the only true thing […], on the other hand, this truth is to the same degree unimaginable, that is, irreducible to the real elements that constitute it. […] a reality that necessarily exceeds its factual elements' (12). Moreover, there is another lacuna in every testimony of Auschwitz: 'witnesses are by definition survivors and so all, to some degree, enjoyed a privilege […] No one has told the destiny of the common prisoner, since it was not materially possible for him to survive' (Levi cited in Agamben 33). As Felman pointed out, the writer bears a kind of 'referential debt', 'a writing debt' transferred from the true witnesses, who did not survive, a ''constant obligation' to the 'woes of history', and to its dead' (Felman 143). Carole Angier suggests that *Fatelessness* attempts to describe this missing tale of the Muselmann[8], as the protagonist narrates his own complete physical disintegration while 'the turn back to the past and the attention directed to the changes of his own body becomes increasingly dominant' in the novel (Angier; Szirák 55). At the end of the book, however, Gyuri Köves returning from the concentration camp comes up against difficulties in describing his experiences: doubts, advice to 'put the horrors behind' him, urging to identify the victims and 'the guilty ones', invitation from a well-meaning journalist to commercialise and politicise the story of the camps and the realisation that 'for strangers, the ignorant' it is 'impossible to

[8] Giorgio Agamben defined the Muselmann, quoting Jean Amery, writing 'The untestifiable, that to which no one has borne witness, has a name. In the jargon of the camp, it is der *Muselmann*, literally "the Muslim." "The so called *Muselmann*, as the camp language termed the prisoner who was giving up and was given up by his comrades, no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions"' (Agamben 41).

imagine' a concentration camp, 'so, that must be why they prefer to talk about hell instead' (Kertész, *Fatelessness* 256, 260, 248, 250).

'The Holocaust, this incomprehensible and unperceivable reality', says Kertész, 'can be truly conceived only with the help of aesthetic imagination' (Kertész, *A Holocaust* 22). In the words of Felman, 'it is precisely because history as holocaust proceeds from a *failure to imagine*, that it takes an *imaginative* medium … to gain an insight into its historical *reality*, as well as into the attested historicity of its unimaginability' (Felman 135). The aim of this literary testimony is 'not just to duplicate or to record events' but 'to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – in one's own body, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement' (138). As Kertész considered the Holocaust as a collective European experience, he felt the moral and intellectual obligation to convey it and also to find an existential solution to bear it. Elizabeth Gold identifies the strength of *Fatelessness* that it shows that 'the Holocaust didn't happen to extraordinary people but to ordinary ones, with ordinary concerns, living in ordinary places. Not heroes. Not people in any way different from us' (Gold). The 14-year old protagonist is recalling the events in the very order he was experiencing them and, as Péter Szirák pointed out, there is no 'real difference between the time of narration and the narrated time' (Szirák 48). As 'the inevitably past tense narration pretends to be in the present, the protagonist-narrator does not have the organising-restructuring principles of subsequent knowledge at his disposal' and there is hardly any 'explaining-justifying' commentary (48). Consequently, the reader is living through the events together with the protagonist and is gradually introduced into 'the mechanism of Auschwitz' while his 'preliminary (or rather subsequent) ideological considerations' are neutralized (49).

For Kertész's protagonists, most of them writers, as also for himself, writing creates the possibility of resisting the forces of history and of reclaiming, taking back his individual life, 'this fragile gift bestowed for an uncertain time, which had been seized, expropriated by alien forces, and circumscribed, marked up, branded' by history (Kertész 'Nobel'). Kertész quoted György Köves, the main character in

both *Fatelessness* and as a young and middle-aged writer in Kertész's third book *Fiasco*, in his lecture *A Holocaust mint kultúra* (Holocaust as Culture) stating:

> I might have embarked on writing to take revenge on the world […] to gain from it, from what it excluded me […] if only in the realm of imagination and with artificial means but to make myself master over reality which – in a highly realistic way – has me in its power; to change my perpetual state of being an object into the position of the subject, to become the one who gives the name instead of being the named one. (Kertész, *A Holocaust* 38)

Kertész's observations, however, also implied some ethical questions about the aesthetic depiction of Auschwitz: 'How could the horror be the object of the aesthetic, if there is nothing original in it? The mere facts can serve only with heaps of corpses instead of exemplary death' (Kertész, *A Holocaust* 39). Kertész admitted that 'it might seem a paradox and cruel thing' that he talks about art in relation to Auschwitz, but he reasoned:

> after all, it is still a fact that the lack of style, art is nowadays so often blamed for – it is enough to refer here to the concept of "the post-modern" – disappears, changes at once when art finds some sort of background, basis which it can lean on – a myth, a religion, etc. Only if he discovers an Archimedean point, does an artist create style. This is why I as a novelist profess: Auschwitz is for me grace. (Kertész, 'Az Auschwitzban' 168-169)

Speaking about Jean Amery Kertész said if Amery wanted to survive his survival of Auschwitz, 'if he wanted to endow it with meaning, or rather with content, then he, a writer, could see the only possibility in self-documentation, self-examination, in objectification – namely in culture' (Kertész, *A Holocaust* 37). In Kertész's case reality and fiction uniquely and outstandingly interpenetrated each other. He regularly referred to his own novels and quotes his characters to describe the events and atmospheres of his life, to explain his thoughts and feelings. He claimed that he considered his life as 'raw material' for his novels, and this liberated him 'from any inhibitions' (Kertész, *Dossier* 10). In *Kaddish* the first person narrator, an Auschwitz survivor writer, states, 'as long as I am working I am,

and if I were not working, who knows, would I be? could I be?' (Kertész, *Kaddish* 50). He recognizes his life

> on the one hand as fact, on the other as a *cerebral mode of existence*, to be more precise, a certain mode of existence that would no longer survive, did not wish to survive, indeed probably was not even capable of surviving survival, a life which nevertheless has its own demand, namely, that it *be formed*, like a rounded, rock-hard object, in order that it should *persist*, after all, no matter why, no matter for whom – *for everybody and nobody*, for whoever it is or isn't, it's all the same, for whoever will feel shame on our account and (possibly) for us; which I should put an end to and liquidate, however, as *fact*, as the mere fact of survival, even if, and truly only if, that fact happens to be me. (Kertész, *Kaddish* 119)

To fulfil the moral obligation of the Auschwitz survival, to formulate its stories has a meaning only if one believes that there are and will be people who are capable of recognising the moral consequences of the Holocaust and 'feel shame on our account', moreover who are clear-sighted enough to feel shame '(possibly) for us' as well because of understanding the complexity of dictatorships, which 'forced a person to choose in a way we were never forced to choose before: to become either a victim or a perpetrator. Even surviving involved collaboration, compromises' (Kertész cited in Evans 2006). The question of a receptive audience carries universal significance as Kertész has never considered Auschwitz as 'an exceptional occurrence […] outside the normal history of Western Europe', or as a limited "Jewish issue" (The Swedish Academy, 'Bio-bibliography') (Kertész, *A Holocaust* 27). What Kertész discovered in Auschwitz or in 'the complex of problems referred to as the Holocaust' is 'the human condition, the end point of a great adventure, where the European traveller arrived after his two-thousand-year-old moral and cultural history' (Kertész, 'Nobel'). The question is how to deal with this 'trauma of European civilization […] whether this trauma lives on as a culture or neurosis, in a constructive or destructive form in European societies' (Kertész, 'Banquet'). While he expressed his hope 'that at the bottom of all great realizations, even if they are born of unsurpassed tragedies, there lies the greatest European value of all, the longing for liberty, which suffuses our lives with something more, a richness, making us aware of the positive fact of our existence, and the

responsibility we all bear for it', he gave voice at the same time to more pessimistic views about the future of humanity, as in *Kaddish* life is formed 'for everybody and nobody' (Kertész, 'Nobel').

Life, however, is also formed 'for whoever it is or isn't, it's all the same, for whoever will feel shame on our account and (possibly) for us', which, as the book is addressed to the unborn child, could also refer to future generations, suggests that the audience (conversational partner) of both writing and the communicative act of life is God or a divine power. The fact that this possibility is recurrent and never completely ruled out in Kertész's works gives a transcendental flavour to Kertész's thinking (Kertész, *Dossier* 149). In *Kaddish* the protagonist-narrator regularly addresses his readers, even though he questions their existence, for instance, when he adding a detail writes:

> I didn't mention it before, but then why would I have mentioned it, as I know anyway, so why do I pretend that these jottings concern anyone else but me, though they do, of course – I write because I have to write, and if one writes, one *engages in a dialogue*, I read somewhere; as long as god existed, probably *one engaged in a dialogue* with God, but now that He no longer exists most likely one can only engage in a dialogue with other people or, in the better case, with oneself, or in other words talks or mumbles, as you like, to oneself. (Kertész, *Kaddish* 18-19)

On the one hand, the dialogue nature of the book also comes from its prayer form implying that it is addressed to God, which feeling is further strengthened by the several religious exclamations. On the other hand, as it becomes clear already from the title, the kaddish, the ancient Jewish prayer to God for the dead, is said here for the unborn child who the narrative monologue is actually addressed to. At the same time the line of the book is based on three meta-narratives, three conversations from the past which the narrator conducted with a fellow writer, one at a party and a several-year-long one with his (future/ex)-wife. The reader's feeling that he takes part in a dialogue is also supported by the informative and discursive style of writing which resembles speaking with exclamations, questions and broken sentences wedged in the narrative to express the difficulty of composition.

Dossier K. is, according to its original Hungarian blurb, 'an autobiography for two voices' as it was based on a long interview conducted with the writer by his friend and editor, Zoltán Hafner (Kertész, K. Blurb). The author of the book is, however, Kertész alone, who states in his foreword that he has put aside the script of the interview to compose 'a veritable autobiography' (Kertész, *Dossier* 1). Moreover, he continues, '[i]f one acknowledges Nietzsche's proposition that the prototype of the novel as an art form was to be found in the Platonic dialogues, then the Reader is in fact holding a novel in his or her hands' (1). Péter Dérczy argues that 'two types of speaking can be attributed to the same voice and tone', as the tone and modulation do not differ at all, and – especially from the second third of the text – the questions are often significantly longer and carry more information than the answers' (Dérczy 27). This means that 'the speaker is having a conversation with himself', and this 'self-dialogue' is 'a special attempt to understand himself, during which the speaker makes himself face on the one hand his path of life, and on the other his works' (27). As Dérczy points out, 'Kertész's whole creative attitude is well characterized by self-reflection, the deeply felt need of the perpetually spouting self-analysis, which in essence embeds the writer's life and oeuvre in the framework of philosophy' (27). Kertész observes that using his life as a material for his novels results in that his 'self' is ' is able to vanish nicely and comfortably between fiction and the facts that are called reality' (Kertész, *Kaddish* 74). Kertész's novels do not only seem to serve for him as tools for his 'inward journeys', but his situation seems to be properly described by Paul de Man's proposal that 'although we assume that the life produces the autobiography, it is equally possible that the autobiographical project produces and determines life' (de Man, cited in Marcus 241). He suggests that ''autobiography […] is not a genre or mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree in all texts' (241).

'Egyetlen identitásom van, az írásbeli identitás. (Eine sich selbst schreibende Identität)'. 'My only identity is in writing' is a translated version of what Imre Kertész stated in his mother and writing tongue, Hungarian and then repeated in brackets in German, in the language which helped him towards literary consecration (Kertész, *Valaki* 75). 'Who am I otherwise? Who would know it?' asks Kertész in his 'novel-diary' *Valaki más* (Somebody Else) with the motto 'I: is

somebody else' from Rimbaud (Rimbaud cited in Kertész, *Valaki* 5). For Kertész writing is also a means to search relentlessly for the unachievable moment in his life, when, as the narrator in *Kaddish* imagines, it were given to him to live in step with the functioning of his body, his mind, his consciousness and 'the involuntary yet merciful presence' of his transcendental soul

> for just a single moment, I *might see, know and possess* myself in this way, when there could be no question of course of either possessor or possession, but *my identity* would simply spring into existence, which can never, ever come into existence; if just one such unrealizable moment were to be realized, maybe that would abolish my "sense of strangeness," teach me to *know*, and only then would I know what it means to be. […] I don't know why, […] instead of living a life that may, perhaps, exist somewhere, I am obliged to live merely that fragment which happens to have been given to me: this gender, this body, this consciousness, this geographical arena, this fate, language, history and substance. (Kertész, *Kaddish* 64-65)

It is not only impossible since 'it being common knowledge that we don't know – and can never know - what causes the cause of our presence, we are not acquainted with the purpose of our presence, nor do we know why we must disappear from here once we appeared', but also because of time since, in Kertész's words, 'places where the decisive events of our lives took place are worth being visited now and then in order to realize: we have nothing in common with ourselves' (Kertész, *Valaki* 81). Moreover, in the twentieth century in the quest for individuality one has to resist the temptation of ideologies and group identities, while one is also exposed to the forces of history, as is especially true in the case of Kertész, who became subjected to and freed from several dictatorships in his life. 'My irrelevant personality stamps here and there, stops now and again, then proceeds as required by the circumstances and by the people around me who are busy acting' (81). Consequently, for Kertész 'I' is always a problematic concept or, as he observed, '"I" is a fiction, and to be its co-author is the most we can aim at' (5).

This complex and problematic relationship with any given identity is also apparent in Kertész's feelings and attitude towards Hungary. On the one hand, he was investigating and questioning the Hungarian part of his identity and was

distinctively separating himself from the Hungarian political, social, cultural and even the literary world. On the other, he decided to stay in the country despite opportunities to leave and so committed himself to write in Hungarian and if to anybody then to people who can read in Hungarian. Neither his fictional works nor Kertész's public lectures and statements in interviews display traditional patriotic sentiments or partiality for the country that he observes and analyses with such clear-sightedness and fair-mindedness. In *Fatelessness* the fifteen-year-old Köves describes his arrival in Hungary from Auschwitz in his detached style, admitting his reliance on others to recognise his homeland: 'I became conscious that I was now able to read the names of all the places we were passing through in Hungarian. The body of water that was being pointed out and dazzling my eyes was the Danube; the land all around, baking and shimmering in the bright sunshine, was now Hungarian they said' (Kertész, *Fatelessness* 242). At the same time the importance of the Hungarian language manifests itself here as also in *Fiasco*, although already from a writer's point of view, when Köves turns down his friend's invitation to leave the country during the revolution in 1956:

> "Sorry, but I can't go," […]
> […] "Don't you want to be free? […]
> "Of course I do," […] "The only trouble is," […] "I have to write a novel."
> […] "You can write it later, somewhere else," […]
> "Yes, but this is the only language I know," […]
> "You'll learn another one," […]
> "By the time I learn one I'll have forgotten my novel."
> "Then you'll write another one." […]
> "I can only write the one novel it is given me to write," (Kertész, *Fiasco* 355)

On the one hand, Kertész often emphasises that what makes him a Hungarian writer is that he uses his mother tongue, with 'the encompassing power of the already-thereness of the language and of the culture' (Derrida 161). On the other hand, his connection with Hungarian language is as complex as his relations with his homeland and his Jewishness. In his speech 'A száműzött nyelv' (The Exiled Language) he states, 'I like writing in Hungarian, as in this way I can experience the impossibility of writing,' and 'the stranger I am in the language, the

more authentic I feel myself and my writing' (Kertész, 'A száműzött' 291). Then he refers to that part of Kafka's letter to Max Brod about 'linguistic impossibilities' in which Kafka analyses 'the situation of a Jewish writer' (291). For Kafka these 'linguistic impossibilities' are 'the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing differently' and 'one might add a fourth impossibility, the impossibility of writing' (Franz Kafka, cited in Casanova 254). Pascale Casanova considers the importance of language in *The World Republic of Letters* 'as the major component of literary capital', so, according to her, 'for Jewish intellectuals, use of the German language amounted to "appropriation of someone else's property, something not earned, but stolen by means of a relatively causal gesture. Yet it remains someone else's property, even though there is no evidence of a single solecism"' (Casanova 255; Franz Kafka, cited in Casanova 272-273). Kertész suggests that Kafka today 'might add the impossibility of writing about the Holocaust' and applies Kafka's impossibilities to the Holocaust concluding that 'the writer of the Holocaust is always and in every language a spiritual refugee, who asks for spiritual refuge always in foreign languages' (Kertész, 'A száműzött' 292). Kertész' thoughts mirror Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's reflection on minor literature and a language's schizophrenic condition, which is discussed in detail in relation to Végel's and Parks's works. Kertész felt that he was writing his books 'in a guest language, which by nature expels them or tolerates them only at the periphery of its realm of consciousness at most' (291). In *Fatelessness* the protagonist when in the concentration camp he is telling the other children from different countries that he is from Hungary is laughed at, which makes him conclude that they have

> already made acquaintance with my kind, and fairly thoroughly at that. That was unpleasant, and I would have liked somehow to inform them it was a mistake, since Hungarians did not consider me as one of them; that broadly speaking, I too was able to share that same opinion of them, and I found it very odd, not to say unfair, that it should be me, of all people, who was being looked at askance on their account; but then I remembered the farcical barrier, that to be sure, I could only tell them that in Hungarian, or at best possibly German, which was even worse, I had to concede. (Kertész, *Fatelessness* 197)

Kertész also emphasised the problematic nature of ‘the language after Auschwitz’ and described it with a music expression as ‘atonal language’ (Kertész, ‘A száműzött’ 289). ‘Since if tonality, a unified system of keys is considered as a commonly accepted convention, then atonality declares the invalidity of this common agreement, this tradition. In literature there also used to exist a major key, the system of values based on the commonly accepted morality and ethics, which determined the scheme of relations among sentences and thoughts’ (289). Kertész states, ‘after Beckett and Borowski one cannot write pretending that the Holocaust had not happened. One of Beckett’s heroes poses the question: “We have lost our rights?” – and the background of the question is obviously the Holocaust, which deeply pervades the European awareness of its civilisation’ (Kertész, ’A haláltudat’ 188-189). This belief of Kertész’s made him break with the accepted form of holocaust literature with its realistic storytelling and create an innovative form and language in *Fatelessness*.

In addition to the two already mentioned components contributing to the alienation of language: the impossibilities of a Jewish writer and the atonal language after Auschwitz, for Kertész there is also a third component, which results from the language requisition of the totalitarian states. In the totalitarian dictatorships there is something happening with the people that has never happened before:

> the total language, or as Orwell calls it the “Newspeak”, with the help of the well-portioned dynamics of violence and terror, irresistibly penetrates the mind of the individual, and slowly overtakes it from him, closing him out of it and out of his own inner life. […] This is also the way to totally annihilate his personality; and if he can really survive it, it will take him a long time – if it is possible at all – to regain the personal and the only authentic language, which he can use to tell his tragedy; and then he might even realize that this tragedy cannot be told. (Kertész, ‘A száműzött’ 279-280)

In Kertész’s fictional works the narrative language itself conveys the writer’s belief in the impossibilities of writing. The narration in all of his books is never straight and simple but is continuously turning on itself and taking itself apart. Kertész’s aim is to reveal the deformations different dictatorships caused in the language and so in the thinking of Hungarian people and to liberate language from

the influence of any ideology. His narrative style is self-ironical, it even mocks itself and its impossibility to convey the truth, it repeatedly reveals the subjective and always changing meanings of words and the complete failure of language to describe reality and the fact that language often becomes the helpless plaything of different ideologies. Moreover, following the intricate web of Kertész's philosophy in all of his writings leads the reader to the realisation that words carry different, more refined and richer meanings than in their everyday use.[9] Kertész also uses form to express the unreliability of language and the inherent failure of narration. In *Fiasco*, his second novel, which can also be seen as the continuation of *Fatelessness* in the sense that in both novels the narrator-protagonists are called Köves and are Auschwitz survivors, Köves's story set during the communist regime is only the meta-novel 'Fiasco' written by the real protagonist, the 'old boy' after the political changes. It has a cyclical ending, as it starts with the struggles of the old boy to write a novel and finishes with the knowledge that the old boy is compelled to write many more books in order to be entitled for a state pension. This sense of the world constantly re-creating itself, the infinite cyclicality of events and situations is especially significant as this novel starts to investigate the life already after the changes, under democracy, to which I shall return later, and this feeling is even further strengthened in Kertész's last fictional work, *Liquidation*.

Liquidation starts with a quotation from Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy* and Kertész uses a very similar method[10]. *Liquidation* is built up by the several layers of meta-stories and so uses several different narrators and narrative forms. The first, omnipotent narrator begins the book by emphasising the artificiality of writing and inviting the reader into the creation of the fictional world: 'Let us call our man, the hero of this story, Kingbitter. We imagine a man, and a name to go with him. Or conversely, let us imagine the name, and the man to go with it. Though this may all

[9] This realization made László F. Földényi compile his 'Imre Kertész-glossary' of the 'characteristic words of the oeuvre in alphabetical order' from 'abszurd' (absurd) to 'zsidó' (Jewish) (Földényi F. *Az irodalom* 7). Its title is taken from Kertész: „Az irodalom gyanúba keveredett" ('Literature has become suspect').

[10] The quoted sentences are: 'Then I went back into the house and wrote. It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (Beckett 7). These quoted last sentences of Beckett's repeat the beginning lines of the book's first part, whose protagonist-narrator is different from the second part, rendering the whole novel's narration ambiguous and uncertain, while at the same time connecting the book's ending with its beginning makes the story and the narration a ceaselessly repetitive, obsessive circle. The repetition of the present continuous tense sentences immediately negated in the past also renders the time of the narration uncertain, and the open emphasis on the activity of writing in the narrated story itself with its immediate questioning reveals the unreliability of language and the inherent failure of narration.

be avoided anyway since our man, the hero of this story, really is called Kingbitter' (Kertész, *Liquidation* 3). 'The hero' is reading a play, which is called 'Liquidation' and quoted extensively in the story, about himself and the other characters of the book, which, although it was written long time ago by B, who had committed suicide soon afterwards, became 'played out in reality, almost word for word' after the suicide, as we get to know from the narrator (9). This narrator, however, disappears in a short time as the play becomes reality and takes over the place and the time of the story from the narrated present ('nowadays – a late year of the passing millennium, in the early spring of, let us say, 1999') to the doubly-narrated past (3). The book without break continues with the first-person narration of Kingbitter, who as the narrator-protagonist is acting out B's play, while he is searching for B's missing novel. Kingbitter becomes obsessed with this novel, as he believes it contains B's, the Writer's or Scribe's 'secret', 'the teaching', 'the quintessence, the sense' (98). In this 'censored, evil, and illiterate world' Kingbitter believes only in writing, as 'there was a time when the secret was known, but now it has been forgotten; the world is composed of disintegrating fragments, an incoherent dark chaos, sustained by writing alone'(97). This complete intertwining of reality and writing or fiction in *Liquidation*'s several layers of stories makes reality 'a problematic concept' not only for Kingbitter and for 'the character the play called Kingbitter' but for the reader as well (10).

For Kingbitter reality is, however, not only 'a problematic concept' but also 'a problematic *state*', since as it is revealed by the omnipotent narrator at the beginning of the book, the play, this 'comedy (tragedy?)', the end of which the reader gets to know only at the end of the book, 'had reached an end, but he was still here, posing a problem for which he more and more put off finding a solution' (3, 68, 10). As B's book, and with it a possible answer and solution, is destroyed before Kingbitter and with him the reader could have read it, *Liquidation* finishes by closing on itself through returning to the starting scene with the unanswered and unresolved problems of Kingbitter's. The book's very last sentences, recalling the words flashing on the screen of Kingbitter's computer: 'Next step. Cancel.' relate not only to his narrated, written story and so to his past, retrospectively questioning the whole book in a similar way as Beckett's *Molloy* does, but can also refer to his future story and life (129). In his narrative Kingbitter several times mentions the

difficulty of the accurate depiction of events and the failure of memory to recall the anyway questionable reality, and he often addresses the reader to warn him of these failures and impossibilities of writing. As he articulates it, 'I sense that I'm slightly departing from […] What indeed? Reality? How could I depart from reality, totally incomprehensible and unknowable as it is, though being eternally shielded from us by our imagination, thank God!' (85).

To escape the unbearable reality during the dictatorships the decision whether staying or leaving was a common dilemma for the Hungarian intelligentsia, however, Kertész's idiosyncratic solution was a kind of spiritual, internal exile with turning even the negative aspects of his surroundings to creative inspiration. His autonomy as a writer was the most important issue for him, thus living and working 'under dictatorships, in a hostile, relentlessly alien intellectual environment' resulted in that he 'always considered writing a highly personal, private matter' (Kertész, 'Nobel'). In *Fiasco* the realisation that a writer has to write to himself occurs when Köves's first novel is refused by the publisher and during a period of self-doubts and self-analysis he comes to realize that 'even more important than the novel itself […] was what had been lived through by his writing about it' (Kertész, *Fiasco* 360). Kertész's 'existential self-discovery', when he realised that he has to 'step out of the mesmerizing crowd, out of History' and accept that 'there exists only one reality, and that is me, my own life', happened in 1955 (Kertész, 'Nobel'). That was the time when he decided to devote his time to writing. What he gained from this revelation: 'it was not my art – its tools would not be mine for some time – but my life, which I had almost lost' and the realisation that he can regain his life through writing (Kertész, 'Nobel'). Kertész did not enter the Hungarian literary life at all and while living on translation work continued his 'secret life, which was always the real one' (Kertész, *Gályanapló* 182). The decision of giving up any ambition of 'literary consciousness' and consequently that he claimed to have never been influenced by any pressure to achieve financial success or literary and public position resulted that he considered his novels as complete, exactly as they just could and ought to be (Kertész, 'Nobel').

Moreover, Kertész several times stated that living in Hungary created for him the right atmosphere and environment for writing his novels (Casanova 17, 359). The ambiguity of this situation is expressed in his ironical question referring

to the “goulash Communism” in Hungary from the nineteen-sixties: ‘Can one imagine greater freedom than that enjoyed by a writer in a relatively limited, rather tired, even decadent dictatorship?’ (Kertész, ‘Nobel’). ‘In the West, in a free society’ the free marketplace of books and ideas’ would have probably influenced him ‘to produce a showier fiction’ (Kertész, ‘Nobel’). Living under the different Communist regimes also created the possibility for him to be ‘able to observe, not as a child this time but as an adult, how a dictatorship functions’ helping him towards the formulation of *Fatelessness* based on his childhood memories of Auschwitz, and towards the depiction of the parallels between different totalitarian systems in his other novels (Kertész, ‘Nobel’).

Kertész’s reasons to stay and devote his work to the description of his spiritual and political environment and of the individual who has to live under these circumstances are rather complex. In *Jegyzőkönyv* the narrator, who refers to his novel *Fiasco* and so can be considered as Kertész himself, when interpreting his failed trip to Vienna, accuses himself of believing that due to the political changes in Hungary he can act differently than he had been acting before. He summarises his life until now stating:

> I had been living as a prisoner, hiding my thoughts, my talent, my real self, as I knew it well that here, where I live, I can only be free as a prisoner. I knew it well that this freedom is merely the freedom of a prisoner, namely an illusion; but at least – as I believed – an honest illusion, more honest than if I lived as a prisoner with the illusion of freedom. I could see clearly the dangers of this life, that the life of a prisoner would finally turn me into a prisoner; that it was forcing me deep under the cultural level of the century, that it was narrowing my horizon, it was wearing out my talent. Nevertheless, I wanted to live this way, in the belief that it was still a life, a kind of life that somebody – perhaps exactly me – has to formulate’. (Kertész, *Jegyzőkönyv* 307)

Kertész’s inner exile is founded on his ‘voluntarily chosen and taken on’ ‘world-minority’ position, which cannot be explained with racial, ethical, religious or linguistic concepts as it is ‘a cerebral mode of existence’ (Kertész, ‘Jeruzsálem’ 138-139). He became initiated into ‘the universal world of the negative experience’ due to his Jewishness, as he explains, ‘I consider everything I had to live through in consequence of being born as a Jew as becoming initiated […] into the deepest

acquired knowledge about man and his present situation. And this way, as I lived my Jewishness as negative experience or in other words in a radical way, it led to my liberation. This is the only freedom I achieved for myself during my life spent in different dictatorships and so I have been jealously protecting it' (139). This 'world-minority position' does not mean belonging to any Jewish community, as the narrator categorically points out in *Kaddish*. First of all he and his family and Kertész's as well, as the writer many times emphasised, were not 'genuine Jews', but 'urban Jews, Budapest Jews, which is to say no kind of Jews, though not Christians either of course, but [….] Non-Jewish Jews' (Kertész, *Kaddish* 20). Secondly and more importantly, as the narrator declares, that the 'unique *perspective*' from which alone 'I am willing to be Jewish' is to know that if he were to assimilate to 'the extant, the extant circumstances and conditions', 'that would kill me sooner than if I did not assimilate, which actually would likewise kill me anyway' (118). In Kertész's own words, 'I have always lived as an individual, I have always defined myself as an individual. I do not have any so-called identity-problems. That I am Hungarian is in no way more impossible than that I am a Jew; and that I am a Jew is no more impossible than that I am at all' (Kertész, 'Nem' 67). Kertész here arrived to the very same notion that Nietzsche was describing in relation to a 'good European'. Elbe identified the problem that might lie behind the difficulty of articulating a compelling idea of Europe as '[w]hen the will to truth puts itself into question, the deployment of the idols remains profoundly difficult, as any attempt to articulate the true meaning of earthy existence is likely to remain intellectually unconvincing' (Elbe 84).

This 'cerebral mode of existence', 'this world minority position' of relentlessly resisting the temptation of any group-identity or ideology, which puts Kertész into the position of an outsider observer, is the basic principle of his philosophy. Becoming a writer for Kertész was a means to 'self-authentication', a 'way of refusing to collaborate with dictatorship', as he says, 'I had to establish my independence, my mental independence. I came from two harsh dictatorships, Nazi and Stalinist. I never thought of becoming a writer as such, yet in a lucid moment I recognised what I had to do […] What happened was that I got so deeply involved in these dictatorships, I was beginning to get lost in them. First I had to recognise that I was stepping out of line, out of line with the masses' (Kertész, cited

in Evans). He regularly draws parallels between the Nazi and the Communist totalitarian systems and his novels explore totalitarianism as the everyday social environment of his characters. In *Kaddish* the narrator states, 'it is not worth ranking' 'the extant circumstances and existing conditions' 'according to their qualities – they are the way they are – the only thing that is worth ranking, but then it is *our bounden duty* to rank it, is our *decision*, our decision to carry out total assimilation, or not' (Kertész, *Kaddish* 118). The ambiguity and absurdity of the writer's life in the dictatorships is effectively expressed by his character who writes, 'already in early childhood I could see that I was incapable […] of assimilating to the extant, the existing, *to life*, and despite that, […] I am nevertheless extant, I exist and I live, but in such a way that I know I am incapable of it' (118).

For the protagonist of *Kaddish* his life devoted to relentless pursuit of clear-sightedness helps him not to look at his life anymore 'merely as a series of arbitrary accidents succeeding the arbitrary accident of my birth, because that was not just an unworthy, mistaken, and thus untenable, indeed intolerable, but above all, *useless* – at least for me, an intolerably and shamefully useless – view of life, which I ought to and wish to see much rather as a series of flashes of recognition in which my pride, at least my pride, can take satisfaction' (68-69). Albert Camus in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus* describes the confrontation between this world of arbitrary accidents, our 'unintelligible and limited universe' and 'the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart' as the feeling of absurd (Camus 19, 20). Accepting the incomprehensibility of our world does not, however, mean giving up reason, but, as Camus states referring, as Kertész also does, to pride, 'if I recognize the limits of reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in the middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If that is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up' (38). The absurd thinker knows that he cannot reconcile his 'appetite for the absolute and unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle' (49). As the realisation of our mortality and the meaninglessness of our existence is so much against the survival instinct of man, absurd thinking is 'a confrontation and an unceasing struggle', which implies 'a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be

compared to immature unrest)' (30). For Kertész the method of this relentless pursuit of clear-sightedness, of looking at life 'without appeal' is writing, as it requires the fullest possible understanding of life to be able to describe it, and to turn it to something solid and final by putting words onto paper (Camus 51). When comparing life and writing the narrator of *Kaddish* states:

> *we must at least have the will to fail*, as Bernhard's scientist says, because failure, failure alone, is left as the sole fulfillable experience, I say, and thus I too have the will, if I must have a will to anything, and I must, because I live and write, and both are willings, life being more a blind willing, writing more a sighted willing and therefore, of course, a different kind of willing from life, maybe it has the will to see what life has the will for, because it can do nothing else, it recites life back to life, recapitulates life, as if it, writing, were itself life, though it is not, quite fundamentally, incommensurably, indeed incomparably not that, hence if one starts to write, and one starts to write about life, failure is guaranteed. (Kertész, *Kaddish* 45)

Kertész refers here to two kinds of failure, which are closely related: the failure of writing to mirror reality and the failure of writing that is sighted in contrast to the 'blind willing' of life. For Kertész writing means thinking about and analysing life with the demand of clearly formulating thoughts and so his way of absurd reasoning. The absurd man knows that the world will also stay incomprehensible and without meaning for him and any belief offers comforting but deceptive illusions. In this sense failure is actually the aim of the absurd reasoning, as the narrator of *Kaddish* explains, 'I seek answers to the final, big questions, knowing full well all the while that to every final, big questions there exists just a single final, big answer: the one that solves all things because it stills all questions and all the questioners, and for us, this is the sole existing solution, the final goal of our willings, even if ordinarily we take no notice of it and don't in any way have the will for it, for then we would have no will at all' (Kertész, *Kaddish* 45).

The truth that the flashes of recognition lead into the full realisation of the absurd and so the unavoidable end of life explains partly a recurrent line of *Kaddish*: 'the true nature of my work, which in essence is nothing other than to dig, dig further and to the end, the grave that others started to dig for me in the clouds, the winds, the nothingness' (119). In this motif Kertész referring to Paul Celan's

poem *Death Fugue*, from which a section was chosen as the motto of the book[11], connects the fate of an Auschwitz survivor to writing as the way to the clear-sightedness of the absurd man in our post-Auschwitz world. Kertész believes

> Auschwitz was an absolute moment in the history of Europe, intellectually […] The traditional values have burnt out, have been emptied, and I cannot yet see the creativity which could create new values. Everybody can only write about Auschwitz, even if Auschwitz as such is not present in the work. It is decisive. Beckett never mentions Auschwitz, but his world is ultimately derelict. And one cannot get rid of this. […] We are after something. That is the way we live. What writers can do in this symbolic ice age is to preserve and present individual identities, individual existences that you can pick out from the flow and present as something that moves people, or shock them. (Kertész, cited in Evans)

The need to understand Auschwitz, as well as all the crashing historical experiences, is so urgent as, in Kertész's conviction, their rejection and the refusal of the cathartic knowledge that can be gained from them are the root causes of the abysmal despair that leads to 'the devaluation of life, the rapid *existential decline* destroying our age' (Kertész, 'A boldogtalan' 31). Along with the historical, sociological, economic assessment the necessity of ethical evaluations is no more avoidable. Kertész emphasises that 'a person was not born to disappear in history as a worn-out spare part but to understand their destiny, to face their mortality and […] to save their soul' (41). They can overcome history only with the help of the knowledge derived from experiencing, taking possession of and embracing the tragic identification with the historical experiences (41).

Even during the disheartening, hopeless period of totalitarian history 'knowledge is the only dignified escape, knowledge is the only *good*' (42). This knowledge is, however, not some kind of theoretical exploration but an existential

[11] Paul Celan's lines were given only in the poem's original language, German in the original Hungarian edition, giving it an even more sombre feeling due to the undeniably negative connotations attached to this language, while making it difficult for most of the Hungarian readers to grab its full meaning
In the American edition the English translation accompanying the German original was translated by Michael Hamburger.
"… more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke
you will rise into air
then a grave you will have in the clouds
there one lies unconfined"

issue as the most elemental question to be posed is whether ‘we consider our own life as valuable’ (42). If so, then ‘the human being has to find the way back to themselves, to become a person, an individual’, and ‘through the greatest inner struggle to make themselves accept themselves according to the level of their enormous requirements so that the god living in every human being brings up to themselves the fallible person’ (41). Kertész shares Rudolf Bultmann’s warning that history cannot be perceived from the perspective of an onlooker but only in the responsible decisions of the individual (43). Kertész urges each person to carry out this existential quest for knowledge since ‘[t]he same radical spirit that turns the scandal, the outrage and the shame into the legacy of human knowledge is also a liberating spirit, and it undertakes to meticulously explore the blight of nihilism not in order to give the ground to these forces but, on the contrary, because it can see its own virtual forces being enriched by this’ (42). Taking it to the level of society, Kertész believes that ‘the civilisation that does not state clearly its values or forsakes these stated values will start its way towards devastation, decay’ (43).

The lack of this tradition and inclination in Hungary might be the reason why Kertész even after the political changes in the fresh democracy still maintained his inner exile, albeit after a short time of initial enthusiasm and in an altered form. Kertész summarised his experiences, ‘I am one of those childishly gullible beings who at the time democracy was restored to Hungary supposed that with the cessation of abnormal living conditions everything and everybody would suddenly be normal. As a result, I fainted from one consternation to the next: lies, hatred, racism, and stupidity erupted around me like a carbuncle that had been swelling for forty years and was finally lanced by the surgeon’s scalpel’ (Kertész, *Dossier* 198). After a year of ‘claustrophobic depression’ and writer’s block in the democratic Hungary Kertész decided to live in Berlin because of the realization that abroad he can ‘create the inner freedom that is a precondition for a writer’ much rather than at home (208). By living abroad when continuing to write in Hungarian he recreated the conditions of his internal exile.

Kertész chose Germany for his living place as he several times observed that his work is more understood and appreciated in Germany than in Hungary. Bernhard Fetz raises the question: ‘it would be extremely interesting to find out why Hungarian critics still often have difficulties in dealing with Kertész, while in the

German-language papers appreciative, knowledgeable reviews and nearly always positive analyses of his works are published. One of the reasons might be that many Hungarian intellectuals are incapable of making the conclusions drawn from the dictatorship be the theme of their own post-1989 life and thinking' (Fetz cited in Sárossi 28). Kertész's other explanation for his success in Germany was that this people is already well on the way of historical self-examination. In Hungary in Kertész's case, in addition to the obvious state censorship of the communist regime, there was also a hidden censorship at work, which continued to exist after the changes and from which Germany meant the refuge for him. While in Western-Europe the history of the previous century, especially of Auschwitz, has been under analyses and interpretation, in Eastern Europe these processes have been hindered, because 'facing the Holocaust in its entirety is purification, self-analysis and in this quality European culture, as it makes you belong to Europe; and the dictatorships in Eastern Europe could not let it happen. The suppression, however, maintains ignorance, hatred and lack of culture and education' in relation to Auschwitz (Kertész, 'Az eltökélt' 160,161). Kertész believes that 'every language, every nation, every civilisation has a dominant Self, which registers, rules and illustrates the world', which has been created in the centuries of self-preservation struggle and which as silent national consensus determines its literature and the prevalent criticism (Kertész, 'A száműzött 292, 291). Even when works appeared about the Holocaust or other traumatic events in the recent history of the country they had to adjust to the obligatory forms having been created to describe these themes, so 'the discovery of the terrible experiences', 'the responsibility of the nation, the bereavement work in cooperation, the search for catharsis could not even be considered' (Kertész, 'A haláltudat' 201). 'It was obligatory to emphasise the singularity [of the event], to distance, to ideologise it, to be shocked how it was possible for all these to happen. This tone was required. Independent opinion, original point of view, and most of all the truth were not tolerated.' (184). Kertész, just like later on Végel and Németh, took on the moral obligation of the witness, took the intellectual courage to make the reluctant, often hostile national public face the painful events of its history, and remained committed to the quest of relentlessly returning to the festering sores of society in the hope of finding a cure.

When in *Fatelessness* Gyuri Köves is asked what he feels 'back home again and seeing the city' that he left, he answers, 'hatred' for 'everyone' (Kertész, *Fatelessness* 246). According to Kertész, it is 'one of the most misunderstood, or perhaps better: misinterpreted sentences'[12] in *Fatelessness* (Kertész, *Dossier* 84). What is, however, certain that it mirrors the writer's belief that although Germany had a leading part in the Holocaust it would be an easy solution to blame German people alone, since the Holocaust bequeathed us the unavoidable knowledge that all of us as human beings are capable of committing horrors without limits. In this sense 'the holocaust was not a tragedy of fate only for the Jews but also for the Germans' and German people have realized that the only way to deal with their history is to talk about the past and face up to it (Dalos 118). This is why, as György Fehéri observed, although 'it is grotesque to say, but the Germans are lucky to have an Imre Kertész'[13] (Fehéri 127). He points out that many artists who survived the Holocaust committed suicide later and 'with this fatal move they "refused" the possibility of liberating discussion. Their works are memorials, unchangeable exclamation marks. Imre Kertész is, however, here – chatting and friendly' (126). Moreover, he helped the Germans to experience catharsis as despite the fact that his work 'causes pain', it is not 'rejecting' and 'gives the readers tasks to do, and so offers a prospect' (126). Kertész denied the possibility that the discussion on Auschwitz and its consequences could ever be closed, but during this discussion he 'also listens to the ones to be blamed; he talks about the wrong doings, but he is not threatening. He does not regard what happened to have come from unalterable faults of character' (126). So after the Nobel Prize the Germans wanted to perceive Kertész as being 'in high spirits, even truly happy' and to believe that 'consequently not everything has gone definitively and irreversibly wrong. The time for absolution might come – there exists a way out, a redeeming catharsis' (127).

[12] When in *Dossier K.* the questioner suggests to the writer that he should correct the false interpretations by explaining the meaning of this sentence, Kertész refuses, saying '[i]t's a good thing for a novel to have certain words that live on in readers like a blazing secret' (Kertész, *Dossier* 84).

[13] In his essay 'Miért szeretik Kertész Imrét Németországban? (Why is Imre Kertész loved in Germany?) György Fehéri attempts to analyse the articles published on Kertész in the German press immediately after the Nobel Prize. He raises attention to the problem of generalisation in relation to the use of the expression 'the Germans', ironically stating that ' "the Germans" in general do not exist. Of course, we know, they do. In this writing I had those Germans who read and admit Kertész in their minds' (Fehéri 125). His cautions are applicable to my use of generalisation like "the Hungarians" and "the Germans" as well.

‘To live and write the very same novel’ remarks Kertész in *Gályanapló*, in which he investigates not only the fictional but also autobiographical works of other international writers in his search for ways to live and work authentically (Kertész, *Gályanapló* 65). While writing *Fatelessness* in literary and social solitude of his internal exile Kertész found Kafka’s personal example influential. He, when reading Kafka’s diaries, concludes: ‘writing in anguish, furiously demanding and maintaining literary productivity, without having confidence even for a single moment in people’s understanding or in the possibility of acceptance and at all of his own – considered in a higher sense – success. From the perspective of an artist it is only illegality that can be imagined. And there is a single reason behind all of this: Prague. (Budapest)’ (28). Imre Kertész feels a strong connection to the ‘line of literature which can be drawn from Kafka to Celan’ and was created by assimilated Eastern-European writers who wrote in German and so ‘never became part of their national literatures’ (Kertész, ‘Az önmeghatározás’ 120). This line continues after Auschwitz in different ‘arbitrary’ languages but is ‘embraced’ by the German language and welcomed by Germany (121).

Although most of Kertész’s works were created in his internal exile in the communist Hungary, he states, ‘It was in Germany where I really became a writer. And I do not refer here to the so-called “fame” but that my books had real effects at first here, in Germany. It is probable that German culture, German philosophy, and also German music that I imbibed during my youth played a role in it. Perhaps I can claim that I was able to overcome the horror Germany inflected on the world decades later partly by means of German culture and after turning it into art I gave it back to the Germans’ (Kertész, ‘Miért’ 6). In Kertész’s case the consecrating centre was first of all Berlin in Germany, not only thanks to his translation work and literary connections, but also since, as Casanova pointed out, Berlin ‘remains an important literary center today … for the countries of central Europe that emerged from the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’ (Casanova 116, 117). Kertész’s opinion of Germany shows an Eastern-Central European perspective on the literary. ‘Contrary to the French, the English culture, which is content with itself, the German culture always acted as an intermediary between the Western and the Eastern literatures. […] The road of Eastern European writers towards other languages, towards world literature generally leads through Berlin’ (Kertész, ‘Miért’

11). Kertész, looking for the reasons how Berlin could in historically such a short time turn ‘from the moral and material debris of the war, and afterwards from the communist ‘front city’ into a real world city, into one of the most important capitals in Europe’, lists its ‘openness, liberal world view, endless energy, curiosity, receptivity’ (Kertész, ‘Miért’ 10). These positive characteristics, however, are the consequences of the troubled German history. Stephen Spender observed, ‘the strength and the weakness of Berliners resided in their feeling that they could any time start a completely new life – as they had nothing at their disposal that could have been used as a starting point’ (Spender, cited in Földényi 15) .

At the same time another reason behind the more favourable reception of his writings in Germany can be Casanova’s explanation that international writers’ work, ‘nourished by the great revolutionaries and innovators who have left a mark in the literary capitals, coincides with the categories of those responsible for consecration in the centers’ (Casanova 180). Végel, in his insightful essay on the meaning of Europe for people from the Central-Eastern European post-communist countries, very much in line with Casanova’s theory, observes about the great Western-European countries’ feelings towards us, ‘the prodigal sons’ of the fantasy called “Europe”: ‘your nostalgia towards Europe is acknowledged by them with satisfaction only if you as the naive enthusiast from the periphery stay away from the centre in this way fulfilling your European sense of vocation’ (Végel, ‘Nach’ 211). As the ‘bastard of Europe’ you are expected to ‘learn the languages of the great European nations, acquire their culture and by doing so you can at least partially compensate for your defects from birth’ (211). The obsession of the ‘bastards of Europe’ to compensate and to conform is a recurrent theme in every discussed writer’s work. Kertész’s relentless criticism of the dictatorships can be comfortably interpreted in favour of the Western societies despite his insistence on individuality and his belief that Auschwitz is an organic part of the history of the whole of Europe. His unique position during the communist regime with his complete separation from the communist ideology and life in Hungary in his internal exile and his uncompromising attitude towards the regime make him the ideal post-communist writer for readers from the previously other side of the Iron Curtain. These readers also find ‘the cautious, ambiguous sentences’ and feelings of a common, in every way ‘bankrupt’ Central-Eastern European ‘with a divided

soul' a little bit strange and can feel only sorry for him but no sympathy or by no means admiration (Végel, 'Nach' 218).

In *The Union Jack* the narrator is urged to recall and tell his '"first-hand experiences"' of the 1956 revolution by his younger friends and although he only gives snapshots of his personal life around four decades earlier and describes his impressions and thoughts, he still paints an honest and expressive picture of this period (Kertész, *The Union* 60). Living in the dictatorship the young self of the narrator was tossed between ceaseless terror and ceaseless urge to laugh at the morbidity and perceived only the lack of consistency, the impermanence (11). The older narrator concludes that 'maybe morality (in a certain sense) is nothing more than permanence, and maybe people create conditions that can be designated as a lack of permanence for no other reason than to prevent a condition of morality from being established' (11-12). The story of the Union Jack, although told in sixty pages, consists of only the scene when in the midst of the high hopes and street fights of 'the 56 revolution the narrator catches the sight of a hand waved from a jeep marked by the Union Jack, which movement is prompted by the clapping of the people in the street. 'It was a wave, friendly, welcoming perhaps slightly consolatory gesture, which, at the very least, adumbrated an unreserved endorsement and, by the by, also the solid consciousness that before long that same gloved hand would be touching the rail of the steps leading down from an aircraft onto the runway on arrival home in that distant island country' (37). The conclusion of the scene is that 'several days later, on that same bend in the road, but coming from exactly the opposite direction to that in which the Union Jack had disappeared, tanks suddenly veered into sight' (37).

Kertész might be touching on something fundamental here that separates Europe and Britain. In the continent nearly every country and nation had first-hand experiences of what Kertész's oeuvre attempted to document, witness, explain, interpret and bequeath. The British people mercifully escaped experiencing directly the 'apologia of the existence at any cost', when every value collapses facing the urge of survival (Kertész, *A száműzött* 18). Kertész explained that

> [t]he civilised human coexistence is based on that unspoken common agreement that people are not made to realise that their mere existence

> means more, much more than every single value that has been held dear until that point. When this becomes apparent – because they are forced into a situation by terror when day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment this and only this is perceivable – we cannot talk any more about culture since every value has collapsed in opposition to the survival [instinct]; this kind of survival is not a cultural value, simply because it is nihilistic, an existence at the *expense* of others and not for the *sake* of them, therefore in cultural, community terms it is not only unworthy but also necessarily destructive through the inherent coercive example. (18)

The British people lack the brutal realisation concerning European civilisation shared by the countries of the continent, although they might have gained a similar understanding in the colonies – further strengthening their connection with the Commonwealth –, that 'the nadir of the existence that the human being reached through their depravation in our century is not the specific strange-looking - "incomprehensible" - story of only one or two generations, but equally an empirical form containing the general human possibility, consequently, in given constellation the possibility for us' (20).

The real act of consecration was executed by the Nobel committee awarding Kertész with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002 (Casanova 135). Kertész in his usual sarcastic way observed in an interview given to a Frankfurt newspaper, 'I find it rather interesting, that I was awarded with the Nobel Prize for those of my works which are engaged with the Holocaust or with the opposition of dictatorships. This can apply an educational intention concerning Eastern-European countries' (Kertész, cited in 'A Nobel-díj'). The Academy's Press Release stated that the prize was awarded to Kertész

> "for writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history". … In his writing Imre Kertész explores the possibility of continuing to live and think as an individual in an era in which the subjection of human beings to social forces has become increasingly complete. … The refusal to compromise in Kertész's stance can be perceived clearly in his style, which is reminiscent of the thickest hawthorn hedge, dense and thorny for unsuspecting visitors. But he relieves his readers of the burden of compulsory emotions and inspires a singular freedom of thought. (The Swedish Academy, 'The Nobel')

Whether barbarism in history and in the life of an individual is arbitrary or not is a question that appears in the works of all the writers discussed in the thesis. Julian Evans in his interview with Kertész extends the parallels between Auschwitz and the communist dictatorships to a comparison of Auschwitz and capitalism, throwing light upon one possible contemporary relevance of Kertész's writing for Western readers. Referring to 'the proposition in *Fatelessness* that it is evil, not good, that is explicable: evil is simply the result of making decisions, whereas good has no logic to it' he observes that in our post-Auschwitz world 'good is still out of the ordinary' (Evans). He quotes Kertész, 'modern life is organized so that you benefit at the expense of the other, and the most extreme example of that is a camp' (Kertész, cited in Evans). Moreover, as Evans points out, 'we now live in a state of such conformity that we are in danger of forgetting' 'individual identities, individual existences', which is why Kertész's purpose is as a writer 'to preserve and present' these identities (Evans; Kertész, cited in Evans).

In *Fiasco* the difference, or rather the non-difference between the Western and Eastern parts of Europe is contemplated on in one of the old notes of the old boy, which is set seventeen years after 1956. The then younger self of the old boy accidentally meets two old-time friends: one of whom having emigrated to the Netherlands in '56 is now visiting Hungary, while the other one still lives in Hungary but as a translator to major Western languages, travels a lot to the West. According to the latter's 'metaphysical worldview', from which he removed the metaphysics as 'he believed in consumer goods rather than in God', he 'lived in the Vale of Tears, albeit out of his own free choice, having condemned himself to it, probably through defeatism, but it comforted him greatly that, even if the chance had been blown for him, there nevertheless existed a more glittering other world in which he could have an occasional fling – whenever possible at the state's expense' (Kertész, *Fiasco* 99). When the emigrated friend describes the market driven, profit orientated publishing industry in the West, the younger old man realizes that he is equally an outsider on both sides as he is not a consumer and 'not consumable', he has been somehow left out of the 'vast global metabolism of mass production and consumption', which is driven by capitalism in the West and by the communism in the East, but is fundamentally the same (109).

When analysing the aftermath of the velvet revolutions in the communist countries Kertész felt concerning both sides of the Iron Curtain:

> as if the cloyingness of some kind of hangover mood were haunting Europe, as if she had been woken up on a grey morning to that instead of two *possible* worlds there were suddenly only one single *real* one left for her, the world of economism, capitalism and pragmatic lack of ideas, which is victorious but holds no alternatives and is without transcendence, and from where there is no more any passage to the land of damnation or promise. […] As if this silent buckle [of the communist era] had demolished something in the people, and it is not exactly known what: whether the ethos of resistance, which had provided the frame for an existential form, or whether one set of hope, which might have never been real hope but without doubt it also helped to stand firm – in any case it ended the relativity of correlation. And now we are standing here victorious but tired and disillusioned. (Kertász, 'A boldogtalan' 35-36)

Liquidation, which was published in Hungarian in 2003, can be seen as an assessment of the decade lived under democracy after the political changes. The life offered by democracy and capitalism does not seem to give better solutions to the existential questions experienced by the characters. Kingbitter's general sensation is 'the oppressive sense of implausibility that stuck to him nowadays, haunting him like some agreeable deficiency, at all times and in all places, like Peter Schlemihl and his missing shadow' (14). Nine years after the changes Kindbitter, as it is true on the level of both the novel's structure and his life, feels that 'His story has reached an end, but he himself was still here, posing a problem for which he more and more put off finding a solution' (10). He cannot continue his old life but it is also impossible for him to start a new life 'story'. All around him he can see that people are coming up with different solutions for this problem and 'solutions were all he could see, rather than lives' (10). His completely disillusioned friend Kürti's solution is falling ill as he is 'worn out' (12). As Kürti explains, '[t]he régime was overthrown, and I'm not going to pretend it was me who overthrew it. A general liquidation is in full swing, and I'm not going to join in. I've become a spectator. And I'm not even spectating from the front rows in the stalls but from somewhere up in the gods' (12).

The only character who attempts to escape from this world, where everyone 'makes a botch of his life', is B's ex-wife, Judit, who sets herself apart from all the people and 'the entire world' around her by marrying an intellectually 'innocent', financially successful architect, Adam, a representative of the new era, and becomes 'happy', but with the inner doubt that it is a 'sin' (94). Judit, who is the daughter of Auschwitz survivors and whose name means a Jewess, could understand her 'monstrous heritage' during her marriage with B, who gets his name from the letter tattooed on his thigh as a baby born in Auschwitz, that 'the world is the world of murderers'. Judit's figure and marriage with B can also be interpreted as a version of the heroine in Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard Castle*. Both Judits make their husbands reveal for them the bloody secrets of the past and for the knowledge gained by opening all the closed doors they have to pay with their happiness.

In *Liquidation* Judit, however, wants 'to see the world as a place in which it is possible to live' and by leaving completely behind her past she learns how to forget and how to live with Adam and with herself embodying the post-war generations' silent assimilation technique (117). However, when Kingbitter during his ruthless search for B's manuscript confronts Judit's husband with her past and Adam starts asking questions and wants to understand her and her reasons for carrying out B's last wish of burning the manuscript, she blames him for denouncing their contract and so their happiness. While Adam, just like Kingbitter, feels that the manuscript would have revealed the solution, B in his farewell letter explains to Judith that his imagination and means were inadequate and his realisation that 'one's sole means is, at one and the same time, one's sole possession: one's life' (121). The fragile and far from hopeful attempt to find a solution is formulated through the figure of Adam. Driven by love for Judit and their children he attempts to uncover, investigate and so comprehend the silenced history of the country and Europe and he arrives to the conclusion that here '[e]veryone is Jewish' (123). Carrying the responsibility for his and Judit's half-Jewish children, he poses the questions, 'Who is going to tell them about Auschwitz? Which one of us is going to tell them they are Jewish?' (123). The realisation that everyone is Jewish and its consequences are faced by Végel's and Németh's characters as well, although in slightly different interpretations.

In Kertész's fiction women are rarely present, mainly as silent and only physically nurturing companions in the protagonist's struggles against the hostile world. Therefore, Judit's figure and independent life story gain special significance. As Liliane Kandel emphasised in relation to feminism and anti-Semitism, 'Nazi anti-Semitism was not a subcategory of racism – at least not of *discriminatory or exploitative racism* […]. It was a completely different category: that of *exterminationist racism*' (Kandel 197). From this perspective Judit's decision to break away from her Jewish husband made emotionally sterile by the burden of the past, and to choose life and give birth present a novel alternative in Kertész's last completed fiction. The writer's belief that the experience of the Holocaust has turned all of Europe into an ethical and cultural zero ground, and the *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*'s insistent reasoning against the possibility of birth in this world are replaced by an affirmation of European future. Judit incapacitated by her parents and husband's heritage, however, can find the chance of survival only though a man untouched by history. Meanwhile, the male protagonist commits suicide with the help of morphine that she has provided for him with the intention of soothing his depression and helping him to live. Adam becomes initiated to the shared knowledge through Judit and consequently loses his innocence and chance of unburdened happiness.

The realization that life in the "West" does not necessarily result in a happier and more content life, and that it might not be the ready-made solution for people from the Eastern side in Europe is presented tragically – maybe unintentionally – in Kertész's very last book *A végső kocsma* (The final tavern). This book is an amalgamation of two fragmented versions of his unfinished last work and his two diaries depicting the decade before his death. One diary was aimed for publication as the continuation of his previous diary books but the other was a 'trivial diary' aimed for personal use in order to reconstruct his life and to gain inspiration. This, called 'Trivialitások kertje' (The Garden of Trivialities), is a heartbreaking account of Kertész's last years spent with day-to-day struggle to come to terms with the fame and luxury of the Nobel Prize and the Western life achieved by moving to Berlin. These bitterly but proudly honest pages lead the reader through dark periods of depression, the contemplations on suicide, the impossibilities of writing as a result of public engagements and lack of suitable intellectual atmosphere, the

difficulties of old age and the unavoidable realisation of death. Despite these enormous themes the very last note entry just after a heart-rending description of Kertész's death dream finishes with the lines: 'What does the Western life-style, Western culture mean to him?' (Kertész, *A végső* 371). Kertész addresses this question to the figure of his last planned work, the Biblical Lot. Lot's sketched character, as it can be seen from the diary entries, however, just like all of his previous protagonists, faces and articulates the writer's own dilemmas and thoughts. For Kertész Lot must experience, as the only true person in Sodoma, 'what ostracism, what expulsion, what icy solitude and anxiety' is (377). 'In accordance with the laws of the given *presiding* world Lot without doubt counts as a doubtful being, or possibly even as a lawbreaker', who lives in 'the abomination of his uncommitted crimes' and 'is searching for the sin, the suitable offence fitting him' since it is possible to truly understand the given world only by becoming part of it through committing one of its sins (380). The writer narrator in the planned book can imagine Lot only as 'a modern hobo dipped in and imbued with every juice and bitter marinade of an up-to-date dictatorship', 'a "displaced person", a nameless, stateless nobody' (381). His Lot can only be 'a Lot hungering for visa and settled status', 'a hopelessly alien person, whose skin colour always a little bit differs from the colour of the skin of those with similar skin colour' (382).

Meanwhile, Lot's fate, his lonely virtue, his exile and finally his fall interested Kertész also because of the 'Dionysus experience, the voluntary surrender of the free individual's self in the midst of the mass's ritual frenzy' (11). Kertész's last years spent with experimenting with the Western life-style and embracing Western culture, or at least what they meant for him, did not result in the predictable happiness, content and literary productivity.

After the Nobel Prize Kertész became internationally known and his books were read in a suddenly dramatically increased number of translations around the world. What is peculiar in his case, however, is that he seemed to reach the Hungarian audience in a roundabout way with the help of the Nobel Prize and international literary fame. As Eszter Babarczy pointed out, Kertész's Nobel Prize was 'a source of embarrassment' for most of the Hungarians as 'he was known to and read by so few people in Hungary', so 'the general public was at a loss as how to respond to the prize, how to absorb this recognition of "our" literary experience'

(Babarczy). She claims, ‘the Nobel Committee couldn't have chosen a Hungarian writer whose name and work could do more to fan the suppressed anxiety and aggression associated with the boundaries and meanings of "us"’ due to his Jewishness, his relentless investigation of Auschwitz and so also ‘the Hungarian Holocaust’, which Hungarian society still has not properly faced and become reconciled to, moreover due to his bitterly critical description of Hungarian life and society in all of his writings and often in his public statements (Babarczy).

The fact that it was not Hungary but Germany, who nominated Kertész for the Nobel Prize, according to many analysts, complicates further the reaction of Hungarians, as they were reminded of their own world-class writer by another nation.[14] Moreover, this nation is the one that in Hungary is usually blamed for the Hungarian Holocaust and the teenage sufferings of the writer. While the German press unanimously praised the Nobel Committee for making ‘an especially good decision that is beyond dispute’ that year, in Hungary many criticised the Swedish Academy for not choosing a ‘more Hungarian’ – i.e. more patriotic, more popular in Hungary, etc. – and so more ‘worthy’ writer (Fehéri 125).

Kertész’s example draws attention to the burden of the Nobel Prize as well. He felt that ‘the towers of Stockholm’ blocked the view of his novels for Hungary (Kertész, *Dossier* 108). This bitter statement can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that after the Nobel Prize Kertész and his work were made a tool of skirmishing between the Hungarian political parties,[15] on the other hand, by his sarcasm towards his unexpected superficial popularity. After decades of being almost unknown in Hungary, with the Nobel Prize he suddenly entered the public eye, so books and monographs about him became published, about which he stated that ‘I wouldn’t like to seem ungrateful, but in no case did I have the feeling that the books were really about me, still less about my works[16] (157).

[14] The Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts (the independent organisation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) nominated Magda Szabó twice, while the Hungarian Writers’ Association put Miklós Mészöly and Péter Nádas forward for the Nobel Prize (Bödők 91).

[15] This phenomenon that cultural issues are used for political purposes is sadly not unknown in the Hungarian public life (for example, the construction of the new National Theatre in Budapest). While the Right criticised the Swedish Academy’s decision questioning Kertész’s ‘Hungarianness’, the Left accused the Right of not rejoicing enough over the success of the country. In László Temesi’s little book on the immediate reception of Kertész’s Nobel Prize a small chapter, ‘Duel of words in the press’ is compiled from articles published in the politically motivated press (Temesi 45-50).

[16] Kertész later made an exception with Sára Molnár’s book, *Ugyanegy téma variációi* (Variations for the same theme).

It is, however, not only the Hungarian population which found it hard to come to terms with Kertész's Nobel Prize, but the writer himself as well. Kertész, although being naturally honoured by the Nobel Prize, seemed to be struggling with his new status (Casanova 17). In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he confessed 'a gap … between the high honour' of the Prize and his 'life and work', 'a duality' of 'two selves within' him: of a 'dispassionate' 'cool and detached observer' and of 'the writer whose work, of a sudden, is read around the world' (Kertész 'Nobel'). The questioner in *Dossier K.* summarises the position of the first Hungarian Literature Laureate stating, 'you have become a well-known, indeed world famous, writer […] People pay attention to you, expecting words of redemption, perfection, beauty, looking for them in your works. You are girt by an aura of glory…' (Kertész, *Dossier* 260). It is, however, immediately negated by a quotation from the old boy in *Fiasco*: 'I was not endowed with the redeeming word; I was not interested in perfection, or beauty, not even knowing what those are. I regard notions of glory as the masturbation fantasies of senile old men, immortality as simply risible' (Kertész, *Dossier* 260).

Dossier K., Kertész's book written after the Nobel Prize[17] was described by him as the only one of his books that he has 'written more because of external prompting than out of any inner compulsion' (5). This admittedly autobiographical book, which looks back on his life and oeuvre and methodically goes through the details even touching on his personal life, suggests that Kertész's literary credit has been increasing in his own and in other people's eyes, and from the perspective of the Nobel Prize not only his literary but also his real life became considered meaningful and worthy to be read about and so to be published. Wolfgang Schneider classifies *Dossier K.* as secondary literature because 'there is something hermetic in the book, which fundamentally excludes the majority of the reading public. As Kertész's highbrow reflections on his own novels presuppose a thorough knowledge of his oeuvre' (Schneider, cited in Sárossi, 28).

At the same time, however, the book can also be looked at as the continuation of *Gályanapló* és *Valaki más*, his 'intellectual prose – a kind of workbooks about reading, writing and death', despite the difference between their

[17] *Liquidation*, although published in 2003, was written mainly before the Nobel Prize.

diary and its interview form (Gustafsson). It is especially true, if *Dossier K.* is considered as the self-analytical dialogue of the writer with himself. Moreover, in *Dossier K.* Kertész rejects the common autobiographical perspective when 'we are sitting here at total ease and safety at the endpoint of our story and contentedly chomping away about the splendid triumphal procession' (Kertész, *Dossier* 133). He warns against the 'flawed logic' which considers Stockholm as the final point and looks at his life in the way that would make him think that 'every step we take is another step toward the goal, and we can have complete confidence in each and every step: everything we do is correct, because we are progressing towards our goal' (133). Péter Dérczy points out that if Kertész 'adhered to this traditional principle of reconstruction, he should present his life as if it had taken its final shape in the form of the Nobel Prize, (which also results that nothing can follow it)' (Dérczy 27). The fact that people – among them the writers as well - commonly look at the lives and oeuvre of the Nobel Laureates from this perspective puts an enormous artistic pressure on the Laureates. The logic which sees the Nobel Prize as the ultimate aim of Kertész's life also leads to transcendental questions about the influence if not of a divine force but of fate. He said that in his so-called "career" 'there is something stirring, something absurd, something which cannot be pondered without one being touched by a belief in an otherworldly order, in providence, in metaphysical justice - in other words, without falling into the trap of self-deception' (Kertész, 'Nobel'). For Kertész accepting that his life was progressing towards Stockholm would mean to believe that every event of his life happened towards this end, that

> [t]hat is why we boarded the train that chuffed toward Auschwitz; that is why I was not shoved to the left by the doctor at the Birkenau selection; that is why kindly hands hauled me out from among the corpses at Buchenwald, and so on… in that way the story would come to pass, except it would not be a Job's story of making atonement, as you might suppose, but of a vulgar kitsch, the career of a ridiculous buffoon. Every individual story is kitsch, because it evades the rules; every single survivor attests purely to a breakdown in the machinery that has occurred in an individual case. Truth belongs only to the dead, no one else. (Kertész, *Dossier* 133)

‘Everybody asks about Auschwitz, even though I should talk to them about the rough joys of writing’ writes Kertész in *Valaki más* (Kertész, *Valaki* 71). When in *Dossier K.* the questioner, blaming Kertész’s life story for doing so, turns down the writer’s suggestion about changing the topic from Auschwitz to something ‘ cheerier’, the writer states, ‘[a]ll in all, I’m on the side of cheeriness. My error is that I don’t elicit that feeling in others. […] I was able to win intellectual freedom fairly early on, and from the moment I decided to become a writer I was able to treat my cares as the raw material of my art. And even if that raw material looks fairly cheerless, the form is able to transform it and turn it into pleasure’ (Kertész, *Dossier* 58). Perhaps it is this joy of creation which turns Kertész’s prose, despite the weight of the questions he deals with, so enjoyable and comforting for the reader, who being released from ‘the burden of compulsory emotions’ understands the gaiety, vitality and hope residing in pessimism that is ‘the ethics of opposition’ with ‘the attitude of the determined quest to know and of never retreating from the truth’ (The Swedish Academy, ‘The Nobel’; Kertész, *Az eltökélt* 159, 158). The pleasure of this attitude shared by Nietzsche’s ‘free-spirits’ can provide the means to overcome the exasperation over the unredeemable and self-destructive human condition which compels Europe to endlessly follow the same old devastating patterns vividly described in Brian Aldiss’s novels on Europe’s twentieth century,

Chapter 3

The Same Old Questions

‘I am old and I am bored of it’ said the Hungarian writer, Péter Nádas in 2015 when being asked about the current European crisis. ‘I am bored of the repetitions of history […] bored of those compulsions it repetitively ends up in. […] Behind the surface [of recent events] the structure of the life that a nation, a people and a continent lead, for example, in Europe, and the organising principles behind the structures are changing the least, they are generally staying the same’ (Nádas). For him these structures include the national egotism of the European nations and consequently their lack of cooperation, the European (or rather the Euro-Atlantic) paradox of living off the fat of the land while endlessly exploiting other nations and the environment, and the vicious circle of European postcolonial colonialism, which in practice supports those systems it is theoretically fighting against. He believes that the age of dissatisfaction is reining in Europe, which - while in its dynamic period created immense intellectual, material and emotional differences in the world - now is in decay trying ineffectively to tackle the world’s complex processes with belated quick fixes. Nádas envisioning an apocalyptic future for Europe warns that the channels of radicalisations are again readily available in Europe and in North America, whose nations until now, due to the shock of the Second World War, have been fighting and losing their wars off-sight. He also states that ‘now there are two worlds standing next to or opposite each other, the Islam world and the Christian Europe, one of them has an omnipotent god and the other has a secularised one’ and this inherently creates hatred (Nádas). It is obvious that Nádas, just like Brian Aldiss, uses simplifications and crude reasoning in order to stir up his audience, however, both writers equally aim to highlight the major motifs in current political and social rhetoric and thinking in order to be able to investigate the underlying needs and compulsions for these reductions and schematizations. Nádas’s convenient conflation of Europe and the West and his civilisational view of a European and Islam conflict occlude the internal divisions and complexities in Europe, the West and the Muslim communities and the intricacy of spiritual and

sectarian forces in both the Christian and Islam religions and worlds, he nevertheless articulates many notions pervading current ideologies and narration.

The very same questions, dilemmas, feelings and ideas concerning Europe and the world that were listed by Nádas are formulated in Brian Aldiss's The Squire Quartet (*Life in the West* (1980), *Forgotten Life* (1988), *Remembrance Day* (1993), and *Somewhere East of Life* (1994)) with the additional book *Super-State: A Novel of a Future Europe* (2002) despite the fact that the books were published between 1980 and 2002 and give a fictional portrait of those years. Aldiss is an extremely prolific writer, which might be the reason for his complex but often superfluous style. Furthermore, he works with clichés, sentimental concepts and irony, which, on the one hand, makes his work very interesting to draw conclusions from on the views and feelings of the society, but, on the other hand, makes it rather hard to build a valid argument. He shows the limitless diversity and so confusion of present-day ideas which all seem to be valid and morally justifiable due to the unlimited access to information and opinions. Including Aldiss's earlier works helps to create a historical overview of the changing notions of Europe.

In 1990 Antoine Compagnon, in reflection to the anxiety surrounding the introduction of the open unified market, posed the question in his article entitled 'Mapping the European Mind' what European countries could have in common 'apart from the certitude that Europe would be the first region of the world to be obliterated in case of a nuclear war' (Compagnon, (1) 2). He argued then with amazing foresight that 'if no idea of Europe does exist, it is urgent to invent one, so that Europe, whatever it becomes, will not find itself against culture' (2). The allusion to Voltaire's famous sentence: 'If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him', resonates with Aldiss's notion of Europe which gets always intermingled with a transcendental search. If Compagnon's mission is looked at from the perspective of Bellah's three dimensions of culture, Compagnon suggests the strengthening of the theoretical and mythic cultural aspects of Europe. Responding to the same wish the Squire Quartet and *Super-State* stand apart from Aldiss's other works in the sense that in them Aldiss abandons typical science-fiction topics in order to concentrate on the conflicting notions of past and present European culture and identity. Compagnon's conclusion that 'Europe is present everywhere and yet invisible; the circumference is everywhere and the centre is

nowhere' reflects Aldiss's futile attempts to grasp a unifying concept for the European culture and civilisation as while it is clearly felt and acted out by the characters they regularly fail to articulate and narrate this belonging (7). Compagnon, like Aldiss, is, however, also aware of the danger, in Compagnon's words, of 'a definition that makes it akin to God' and so they attempt to define the European idea in a 'pedestrian fashion' by trying to capture a non-academic, common sense of Europeanness experienced by every-day people (4). While Kertész was relentlessly searching for the ethical and philosophical foundations of the new European culture from the position of his inner exile, Aldiss tries to investigate the mundane conflicts of this belonging. Conscious of Europe's controversial history Compagnon, just as Aldiss in his novels, carries out the survey of the European idea's 'problematic *topoi*, *loci*, or places, its conflicting, controversial, paradoxical haunts', since 'mapping out the spirit of Europe is also and by necessity doubting it' (4). Compagnon tries to invent and classify objects and ideas that 'cross nationalities, and their conflicts and exchanges' in order to map out the 'symbolic landmarks' of Europeanness (4) .

Compagnon identifies three main fields: firstly, 'the emblems which constitute the time and space of the Europeans'; secondly, 'the few concepts that contribute to a European mentality'; and thirdly, 'the aesthetic values that govern European taste' (4). Aldiss in all of the five novels and so through the course of the more than twenty years covering their creation attempts to have an overview of the last century of Europe, forecast its future and identify the benchmarks of the three fields defined above from a distinctly British perspective. Compagnon also warns about the difficulties, encountered by Aldiss and Nádas as well, of the confusion 'between what is European culture and what pertains to Western civilisation at large, and of distinguishing 'between what is European by its origins, and what can be presently called as European' (4).

The four books belonging to Aldiss's Quartet while depicting the lives of linked characters, examines the British perspective on Compagnon's spatiotemporal European identity by revisiting historical events, most importantly, just as for Kertész, the Second World War and the Cold War, and as for Végel, the Yugoslavian War, by travelling through Europe, by pushing its borders as far as Transcaucasia and Yugoslavia and by undermining it when including 'imaginary'

dimensions through literary references and the ex-colonies while depicting the everyday experience of the World Wars and the civil wars in these regions (Compagnon, (1) 5). In connection with what Compagnon termed as 'the European mentality', the novels constantly return to the duality of political, social and personal falsehood and reality, the difference and the relation between East and West, and occasionally North and South, the mindless exploitation of the environment, and to the human consequences of the short-sighted, reckless and ruthless decisions of the political elite (5). As Compagnon observed, when identifying the trans-national European mentality culture 'three orders ought to be taken into consideration, those of the sacred, the civic, and the domestic' (5). Aldiss's characters never stop contemplating about the social and spiritual reasons for and consequences of their and others' actions, meanwhile with the means of science fiction the writer gives the novels a galactic and transcendental scope. He also expresses the absurdity articulated by Kertész that 'since God died, there has been no objective view, we have been living in the state of "panta rhei", there has been no frame, but we have been writing as if there were one, as if despite all the perspective of sub specie aeternitatis, the divine standpoint or the eternal human' (Kertész, *A végső* 10). Although the fifth book is officially not part of the Squire Quartet, the main protagonist of the Quartet's first novel, Thomas Squire dies in this book, which is a dystopia of the future European Union and the world and so a sort of final conclusion to the questions investigated in the Quartet's volumes and to 'the myths that pertain to the European mentality' (Compagnon, (1) 5). Compagnon calls also for exploring 'the vision that Europe has of its others, and that which the others have of Europe', which is partially overtaken by the many non-European characters in the novels and by many of the British characters visiting places outside the island, in addition, Aldiss also considers in some depth the Christian – Muslim division (5). A faculty which is judged by Compagnon profoundly European is doubt, which for him means both Descartes's hyperbolic doubt and the moment of Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness' (Hegel in Compagnon, (1) 6). Compagnon sees this doubt being acted out in the European masochism and guilt concerning colonialism and in the inherent negation of such European categories as progress, humanism and universality (6, 5). For Kertész this presented the fundamental ground for his thinking; Aldiss's novels and characters

are burdened by the obsessive, restless urge to search for ideals, reasons, and categories, to tear them apart by investigating them and after finding them unsatisfactory cast them aside in the haunt for new ones. Turning to the third field of Compagnon, the aesthetic identity of Europe, many of Aldiss's protagonists are involved with different art forms and all of them and the narrators pay considerable attention to the theoretical and practical applications of aesthetics.

In 2001 Aldiss made a comparison with the fifties. Then, according to J. G. Ballard, 'a whole series of nightmarish possibilities appeared for the first time. There was a fear that the human race was threatened by its own brilliance. The only way to write about this then was science fiction' (Ballard, cited in Brown). In the beginning of the twenty-first century Aldiss felt the emphasis was 'more on using the future to hold up a mirror to the present' (Aldiss, cited in Brown). The mirroring function of literature has been a long-standing conviction for Aldiss, who already in 1966 stated that 'I'm for structure in fiction because I believe fiction must mirror and/or shape reality and because I believe the external world has structure: a different sort of structure from fiction's, but fiction is only an analogy for the external world and we must use what we can' (Aldiss, cited in Greenland 69). These structures, many of which evoke the ones mentioned by Nádas, are the main focus of this chapter. Furthermore, Aldiss, in accordance with Ballard's comment, is primarily interested in the self-destructive tendency of the human species, but first of all, European people, the thoughts, customs, ideas that have been leading the European civilisation to its destructive, even suicidal acts in the twentieth century. His fascination with past events is directed by his desire to explore the reasons for the errors of European history and to reflect about, with Mary Midgley's term, 'the deep practical dilemmas' of moral philosophy (Midgley 103).

The first book of the Quartet *Life in the West* is set during the last years of the Cold War and jumps constantly between several periods and settings in the current life of the main character, Tom Squire occasionally even going back to his childhood. Squire, who at the time of the Second World War was already an adolescent but yet too young to fight, when 'the war collapsed', felt that he 'had missed the biggest initiation rite of the century. The allied armies were being disbanded. Detumescence had set in. On the surface, he was relieved. Below,

frustrated, disappointed' (Aldiss, *Life* 206-207). As for the young Squire puberty and the mental and spiritual preparation for becoming a soldier fuse into one, fighting is represented as the inherent instinctive nature of men. Squire follows the line of thinkers who, as Gagnier put it, 'saw the individual's life-force in aggressive competition with others and with the demands of civilisation, the herd, the masses, slave morality, and so forth' (Gagnier 47). To relieve his frustration Squire joined MI6 and was sent to Yugoslavia, which in its post-war ruins was 'all that Squire desired; here was the harshness and challenge of the world war he had missed' (Aldiss, *Life* 208). His sexual drive is also satisfied as he finds a girl whom he 'embraced as eagerly as he did his new life. In her pallor, her treachery, her nakedness, she was a paradigm of her country' (208). It is curious that for Aldiss's male protagonists the possession of foreign women carries the symbolic significance of getting hold of the cultures they embody. By turning the women into symbols he equally becomes the symbol of the British imperialist attitude in the Quartet's novels. Later I shall return to the symbolic representation of women. While this inherent need in Squire's character of winning and conquest concerning both sexes does not seem to change, he is at least continuously investigating and questioning these drives embodying Compagnon's notion of European masochistic guilt. Squire could identify with the Yugoslavian cause of resisting Russian domination standing 'between East and West' as 'he saw clearly a parallel between this lonely war at one end of Europe and the role played at the other end of Europe by Britain, only seven years earlier (209, 210). His involved but equally outsider role becomes symbolic as 'the Serbs preferred him to the Croats. In part, they trusted him because he was British. The label 'Englishman' was sweet in their mouths' (210). This outsider attitude to the country, its war and its fate recalls Nádas's argument about the wars fought off-site. Squire keeps his war mentality even after returning to Britain and starting to settle in the life of aristocracy and so represents the armed-peace sentiment of the Cold War. Even later during his middle years Squire believed that 'the world was a dangerous place. But everyone, of whatever nationality, seemed to prefer to forget that certain ancient laws were not revoked simply by the setting up of trade unions and health services: predators were about. The world was a dangerous place: for the individual as well as for a nation' (98). Squire's constant discrepancies embody 'the dialectics of Ideal

Progress and Civilisation versus vitalism or biological instinct', in which the instinctual drive becomes Nietzsche's 'conception of the will to power' (Gagnier 47).

Squire's Cold War mentality is put into test as a great part of the novel takes place at the 'First International Congress of Intergraphic Criticism', where delegates come from both sides of the Iron Curtain and which is organised to overcome national and political division by the means of academic evaluation of popular culture, which as an effect of globalisation seems to cross borders more effectively. Squire, who kept his connection with the secret service, and many other characters with similar background carry dual roles: one scholastic and one political. Despite the fact that every character becomes the embodiment of his or her nationality and despite Squire's abundant background information he desires to form his relationships based on his personal sympathies, the quality of conference papers and the intellectual attitude of the individuals, highlighting the conflict between individual and collective identities. Squire still cannot help but evaluate people according to the internalised war mentality so whether they would be good to side with 'in a slit trench when the shit's flying', however, even for his own surprise finds that he would choose 'a German and a Russian' (Aldiss, *Life* 202). Nevertheless, due to the complex web of hidden interests, agendas, dependencies and relations the real and honest communication between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe, or even among the characters from the different countries of Western Europe proves to be impossible. With the means of the conference the continent appears to be completely blinded by her own self-importance and suffocating in her own complex and obscure web of national interests and alliances.

As the consequence of the Second World War and the Cold War, and of the resulting hostile and divided mentality of Europe, the continent is falling into decay and losing its influence and Squire presents an alternative for it in Singapore, 'the shining example of capitalism' (89). He claims that 'We in the West no longer care so much for work and discipline. That is why places like Singapore represent the coming century, the twenty-first century, while the nations of Europe sink back towards the nineteenth. Singapore is winning the economic war, as work and discipline always do' (89). Singapore provides the location for Squire's passionate

and uninhibited love affair with his much younger lover. This relationship is featured as an escape from the responsibilities, the duties and customs of Squire's unhappy marriage and respectful settled life in Britain. Singapore as a former British colony which has been thriving since its independence also becomes the symbol of the faultiness of any Eurocentric reasoning. Singapore's exemplary attitude towards many aspects of contemporary life presented in the novel gains extra relevance when compared with its past state as a British territory vividly described in the Squire Quartet's second novel *Forgotten Life*: 'how run down the city really was in the immediate post-war period when the Union Jack still flew there' (Aldiss, *Forgotten* 173).

Forgotten Life is another attempt of Aldiss's to examine the three aspects of European identity listed by Compagnon and to come to terms with one significant event of European history, the Second World War and its effect on people's mind and aesthetic values. Clement Winter, a psychoanalyst and Oxford don specialised in post-war traumas, retraces his and his much older brother Joseph's lives while planning to write his brother's memoirs after Joseph's sudden death. Joseph's character and behaviour turn out to be determined by his troubled relationship with his mother in his early childhood and by his experience as a teenage soldier in the Forgotten Army in Burma during the Second World War. Meanwhile Clement is the representative of the post-war generation, whose personal life is focused on the loss of his young daughter and his wife's way of coping with this tragedy. The War, just as in *Life in the West*, becomes the initiation ritual to a fully lived, adventurous life. Clement going through a midlife crisis, feels that 'he had another life which had never been lived, a life strangled somewhere in those tangled years of his childhood and adolescence, when he had been possessed by a wish to 'get on', and sacrificed the chance of journeys to foreign lands by sitting for his various degrees' (104). His occupation of 'rebuilding of other lives' symbolises the post-war reconstruction time and the desire and belief in the slow recovery of normality and the creation of a better world (104). Clement believes that 'years of soldiering had awoken something primitive in his brother's nature, a rebellious and, from points of view, admirable quality, which had enabled him ever after to live an independent life of struggle' (38). This comparison between the brothers' lives and Clement's regrets brings up the continuous hesitation of the post-war European population

between individualism and community spirit. However, it also entails the dilemma of submission to the official political agendas for the sake of the unity of the state and the object of the personal belonging, let it be a country or a wider community. While for Clement Jospeh becomes the symbol of a fully-lived individualistic realisation, Joseph, who rebels against any kind of authority, is the one who becomes involved with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In contrast to Squire in *Life in the West*, who completely opposes nuclear disarmament in a world 'filled with powerful enemies', Joseph is intellectually committed to the cause despite his emotional need for defence, a remnant from his war experiences (Aldiss, *Life* 97; Aldiss, *Forgotten* 252).

In the third book of the Quartet, *Remembrance Day* Aldiss takes further the investigation of the driving forces behind Europe's history by turning the attention to destiny in relation to both individuals and nations. The question of individual and national destiny becomes vital in the era of the Cold War. Sträth emphasised the construction of frontiers and 'the view on *territorium* as bounded space, with its long history, peaked again in the Cold War. But this culmination was not only based on the division between good and evil, West and East: it was also founded on the idea of the political management of the economy in order to guarantee affluence and full employment, which in turn promoted the emergence of experiences of national communities of destiny' (Sträth, 'Europe' 36). Embry, an American professor comes to Britain to research the IRA bombing in a small hotel in Yarmouth and he is set out to scientifically solve the enigma of destiny and to make a bold attempt to identify the reasons for the human species' inclination to seek disaster. This motif is taken to the extreme in *Super-State*. The characters examined by Embry, whose lives leading to their fatal visit in the hotel are presented in the novel, also grapple with these questions on the level of mundane lives, ordinary feelings. Living through the spring and summer of 1986 in Britain and Czechoslovakia the characters also experience their incomprehension of the workings of their respective political and social environments and their longing for a more just and less brutal human society. The conflict between the ideals of the political ideologies and their everyday realization also torments the characters in both sides of Europe.

Embry denies Hardy's "Immanent Will" and believes that "Fate" or "Destiny" or "the Hand of God" are 'dismissive fatalisms' that 'are inadequate for a scientific age, and should be replaced by a more constructive thinking' and tries to prove his theory of 'circumstance chain', when people's and even nations' early experiences can cause them to fix on a mental model, so individuals' and also countries' memories of disaster 'can lead them to further disaster later in life' (Aldiss, *Remembrance* 269, 9). He comes to Europe as he can find the perfect test case only here and when his scientific credibility is questioned during his appeal for the financial backing of the Anglia University of Norwich, he accuses the opposing scientist, Levine with having a 'too defeatist, too European – too British' attitude (264). Europe with her troubled history and divided present becomes the place where, on the one hand, destiny can be studied in its full complexity, on the other, where the problem is urgent enough to earn financial backing. Levine not only proudly accepts these identities but by adding his Jewishness to them supposes that with the Holocaust in his bones, built into his 'whole world picture' he should be 'predestined for catastrophe' according to Embry. Although Levine finds the American's idea absurd and disgusting and the principal, a war-hero from the Second World War, considers Embry's theory a bunkum, he under the influence of the Remembrance Day Memorial (hence the title) still grants Embry the money as he 'wanted to give his mad American professor his head, to devise something to stand against the bloodbaths disfiguring the twentieth century' (267). His conclusion is shared by many of Aldiss's characters who after having unsuccessfully searched for valid explanations for Europe's troubled history and present but still experiencing the insatiable need for some solution opt for not entirely sound but at least liveable beliefs.

Science fails, however, to provide any valid explanation for the horrors of history. The German character in *Life* with whom Squire forms a close bond if only for the time of the conference articulates another aspect of what Compagnon termed as the European mentality. He observes that 'two world wars, the inroads of psychology, the increasing fate of man as a statistic, or a consumer, or just a faceless speck of proletariat so beloved of Marxist jargon – all such factors have transformed us into fragmented beings. […] Conflict has become more than character – because that's how many people experience life in these days' (Aldiss,

Life 202). This perpetual feeling of uncertainty, impotence and vulnerability leads to the notion, with Kertész's word, 'fatelessness'. Squire explains this process, 'as the civilised world, so called, expanded driving out the animal kingdom, the labyrinthine chain of cause and effect grew more complex' (185). His conclusion, which also explains the events of the twentieth century, is that '[p]eople became so confused, not understanding the cause of their confusion, that any false prophet … who came along offering them a thread through the labyrinth was received rapturously by millions. It was not so much the truth the millions cared about, but the thread itself. Something to hold on to' (185). This resonates with Nietzsche's belief 'in the long line of ascetic ideals generated by Europe's Christian-Platonic heritage' which all provided a meaning by determining the truth of existence and a system of order to be followed (Elbe 53).

The question of belief and transcendent realms of life regularly appear in the novels and although Squire reacts to the Russian character's observation that 'it's a mistake to throw out God' stating that it is 'difficult, painful – not necessarily mistaken. Maybe the evolution of the human race demands it', he also admits that 'God is in many ways the greatest human idea so far' (Aldiss, *Life* 282). Their reasoning echoes Nietzsche's argument on incomplete nihilism as he saw unconditional atheism as the evolution of the 'will to truth', the consequence of its two thousand years of practice. As Elbe pointed out, for Nietzsche modern science is 'nothing but a refined version of the will to truth exemplified in its purest, secular form and applied so consistently that it subsequently undermined the Christian worldview in the popular European imagination' (Elbe 29). The God-shaped hole, with Midgley's term, which 'has been causing trouble for some time', is greatly experienced by many of the characters, especially by Squire (Midgley 286).

Embry in *Remembrance* exploring the unknown territory is in desperate need for a form of thought to contain it. This desire for a solution, a secularist motive for reductivism is taken further in *Super-State*, where in the European Super-State a single mathematician formula is applied uniformly to tackle poverty. In Aldiss's novels the characters while obsessively attempting to make sense of their lives and place it in a universal order regularly fail and only sense that, with Midgley's words 'it is our power of perception and imagination that are not really formulable at all' (Midgley 38). Aldiss by making the characters encounter

fragmentary and incomprehensible spiritual insights, dreams and visions creates the feeling that the world is ‘a strange metaphysical spook, a mysterious entity eternally hidden from us behind a screen of delusive appearances’ (41). Nevertheless, the tone of the novels carry the possibility of Midgley’s interpretation that our perception is not deluded and ‘that what we see is real enough, but is always partial’ (41). Since ‘all perception takes in only a fraction of what is given to it, and all thought narrows that fraction still further in trying to make sense of it’ (41). Nevertheless, the characters are denied the relief of Midgley’s conviction that the real world that exists independently of us is not an incomprehensible mystery but it ‘is simply the whole of what is out there. We glimpse only that small part of its riches that is within our reach, and within that range we must continually choose the still smaller parts on which we will concentrate’ (41). As one of the characters laments, ‘What a bugger we can’t live rational lives. There’s always that other layer going on, behind the eyes’ (Aldiss, *Remembrance* 226).

The characters at the same time sense that scientific, social and political reductivism is not only a necessity but also a dangerous means of power and realize that in this power-relation the reducing agent objectifies the reduced people. This agent with the pretension of scientific impartiality and ‘intellectual austerity’ ignores the ‘subjective angle’ of people and removes the moral side of human relations (Midgley 61). In *Remembrance* what is considered ‘an economic miracle’, an ‘envy of Eastern Europe’ by the member of the Czech Scientific and Technical Council, who has come to Britain to study it, is seen by many of the British characters as ‘laying people off work and increasing unemployment to bring down inflation’, ‘millions off the workforce, thousand homeless, cutting children’s allowances’ (Aldiss, *Remembrance* 74,75). Their consequences presented dramatically in the everyday mundane struggles of Norfolk people, many of whom work for Thomas Squire, who although is often mentioned, appears only for a short scene. In this home environment the European Community appears as something benefitting only the ruling elite but bringing disadvantage to common people. Squire is forced to close his fruit-packing business supplied by a number of Norfolk fruit-growers as ‘imports of fruit from the European Community had cut into the trade. Local growers were undersold by the French, Spanish, and Italian’ (57). He gives ‘the golden handshake’ to five people, one of whom commits suicide (233).

Ray Tebbutt, who is the novel's main representative of the disillusionment of the British lower middle class, directs his frustration to the people in Eastern Europe after hearing about the starting political changes in the Soviet Union. He contemplates that they 'were perfectly ready to blow us up yesterday and today are whining for Western aid and hoping to join the Common Market – well, European Community it is now – Christ, the change in name [….] Europe's still for businessmen only, isn't it? For the rich?' (221). He poses the rhetorical question to them, 'Why should you want to join it? Oh dear, what a bloody world' (221). Aldiss portrays the everyday consequences of the economic pressures that were significant driving forces behind European unification.

While the elite on both sides enjoy untold luxuries and advantages, in the Czechoslovakian side there are also many examples listed from the 'miserable' life of people 'who are so used to being trodden on' that they 'want to go on being trodden on for ever' (91). Aldiss's portrayal of the Czech characters in 1986 follows the crudest stereotypes. On the one hand, Petrik the main male character in his mid-forties is a banned film director, with a film on Kafka, and his every moment is a lament over the bleakness, hopelessness, moral and cultural degradation of the society he is forced to live in. His girlfriend Ondrej in her late twenties, on the other hand, seems to be content with her life as a student and a drug addict, which lifestyle she supports with occasional 'whoring, when possible with foreigners staying in the smart hotels in the centre of Prague' (84). She considers prostitution as a natural and mundane way to earn money and to enjoy the luxuries of hotel rooms. Despite the fact that Western men regarded ''Commie girls' as somehow inferior as human beings' in contrast to 'the Russian and Soviets' who saw 'the girls as 'Western'', she preferred Westerners as 'they used better soaps and were less inclined to haggle over the price' (87). Aldiss's representation strengthens the construction of the stereotypical figure of the Eastern-European prostitute whose voluntary participation in the sex industry is motivated by deviant morality, effortless financial gains and consumer values. This image in different interpretations is going to return in all of the discussed novels.

The question raised on the difference of Europe's Western and Eastern sides are followed through in the Quartet's fourth book, *Somewhere East of Life*. When the novel was published in 1994 Europe was undergoing an enormous

social and political change. As Compagnon pointed out, ‘shaped by the legacies of colonialism, the collapse of Soviet-supported regimes in the East and the development towards greater economic and political integration in the West, the continent is a seething pot of cultural, national, regional, racial, political, religious and social diversity’ (Compagnon, (2) 106). Yet Compagnon maintained his conviction that the idea of Europe still had ‘some meaning as a unifying concept’ (106). In the fourth volume of the Squire Quartet Europe’s borders have been shifted as they are mainly set in Georgia and Turkmenistan but Aldiss uses Budapest as the connecting point between East and West. The book starts with a reception ‘held by World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, which several important functionaries from several important countries were attending’ (Aldiss, *Somewhere* 3). ‘Undeterred by wars in the Caucasus, the East, the Far East, and several points West, the guests paraded in finest array, embracing or snubbing one another. Powdered shoulders, jewels, and luxuriant moustaches were on display’ (4). Hungary is chosen for the gathering of the organisation which employs the main character, the English architectural historian, Roy Burnell since ‘with the wars and trouble in the old Soviet Union republics, in the Caucasus and beyond the Caspian Sea, […] Hungary was neutral, the Switzerland, the crooked casino, of Central Europe’ (16). Burnell has two other reasons for being in Hungary. His close Hungarian friend is in coma after a car accident in which both of them were involved. The possibility that Burnell himself and his life are just ‘the interior monologue’ of his friend appears in the book creating an interesting notion that the whole story might be born only by the imagination of a Hungarian character and encourages the symbolic interpretation of Burnell’s travels and quest for home, especially as Burnell’s other reason to visit Hungary is to inspect a **‘**danse macabre’ painting. (196).

The book attempts to create a science fiction impression of the immediate Post-Cold War era. The limited third-person narration presents this still-divided Europe through the eyes of the main character, who travels back and forth between the West (symbolised by a synthetic bureaucratic city formed in Frankfurt) and the East. He is continuously on the move. Joseph Milicia observed that Aldiss when writing about characters who set off to explore unknown territories is concerned with ‘what is driving his characters onward. Most often his explorers are

more like escapees – either from the "home" environment or from the new one into which they have been thrust. Thus some of the travels in Aldiss are Byronic journeys, more to forget than to find, while others are odysseys, searches for home' (Milicia). In *Somewhere* Burnell is a double escapee first from home and then from the overcivilised world of his apartment in Frankfurt and here the exploration of alien worlds, the familiar topic of science fiction is replaced by the exploration of Eastern Europe. The descriptions of Burnell's moves, in what is for him foreign territory, often depict an astronaut-like figure moving in space. The book's main concern is the outward reasons and the inner driving-forces that make Burnell explore unknown territories of the world and of his soul. At the same time due to a futuristic version of the virtual entertainment industry, Burnell embarks on an Odyssey quest for home to find his lost memory about his marriage and domestic happiness. In the story the e-mnemonicvision technique has been developed to remove memories from the brain and to reproduce them for entertainment. Burnell becomes a victim of illegal memory theft in Budapest and consequently loses 10 years of memory.

Even before his partial amnesia Burnell is strikingly different from Squire, who still believes in fighting for a cause, and from Clement Winter, who embodies the post-war generation's desire for peace and unity. Burnell is only 'a wanderer, without vision' and in that as the narrator observes 'he seemed a typical man of his time, 'The Era of the Question Mark' […] The dreadful inheritance of the twentieth century rumbled about everyone's head' (Aldiss, *Somewhere* 14). The phrase possibly refers to Nietzsche describing the 'perplexing and disorienting consequences' of modern European nihilism (Elbe 36).[18] Without any ethical, philosophical, social or even political thread to follow Burnell feels out of place everywhere and is known for his preference for uncomfortable and harsh places. He regularly embarks not only on dangerous ventures but by using drugs he takes spiritual trips as well. Meanwhile, he, just like the other protagonists but with a different quality, is the embodiment of the British elite as others 'saw him as the

[18] 'Have we not exposed ourselves to the suspicion of an opposition – an opposition between the world in which we are at home up to now with our reverences that perhaps made it possible for us to *endure* life, and another world *that consists of us* – an inexorable, fundamental, and deepest suspicion about ourselves that is more and more gaining worse and worse control of us Europeans and that could easily confront coming generations with a terrifying Either/Or; 'Either abolish your reverences or *yourselves!*' The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be – nihilism? – This is *our* question mark' (Nietzsche 287).

cool Englishman of tradition' (Aldiss, *Somewhere* 14). However, these traditions have become only empty role patterns and not values to hang onto. He uses his country's traditional power positioning the world to gain entry everywhere and in the name of civilisation and under the disguise of world heritage protection to steal local cultural treasures. For Burnell the most fitting assignments at the World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage are 'Georgia, Armenia, Abkhazia […] Lots of obscure people with obscure names: Chechens, Ossetians, Inhuish, Abygs, in that general area. Mainly the states are run by terrible men –ex-bomber pilots, mass murderers. Fighting goes on all the time' (72). These places manifest Burnell's disillusioned spirit with empty and devalued ideals and his permanent inner conflict. Moreover, in these places he can preserve his completely outsider, observant role without the danger of getting involved and compelled to form judgements or make a stand.

Burnell himself observes the changing position of Britain in this part of the world, 'earlier generations of English men had regarded Transcaucasia as a legitimate part of the great globe with which the British were involved, to ruin or rule. Throughout the last century, British power had dwindled away. The British Isles were now a remote appendage of central EU power' (90). While Squire was welcomed in Yugoslavia, Burnell is only tolerated by the local people fighting in the war as they want to receive the EU aid and the American military support. While people are hoping for help from the EU as they 'are Christian people for many centuries', Burnell believes that the EU has 'given up on Transcaucasia long ago' (92). The USA is represented by a peace negotiator, but America is involved in the fights supporting the Russian side due to the area's oil and other natural resources. Although officially Burnell is there to enlist a remote church, his underlining mission is to smuggle out a priceless icon for a private collector. As he observed, '[a]long with the desire for knowledge, and a laudable determination to preserve whatever was of artistic merit, went an undercurrent of greed. Perhaps it was inevitable that the technological culture of the West had spread to claim other cultures. […] The West was an acquisitive society' (145). The narrator still ponders, '[w]hat was it that agitated European races and not others? Part of that particular dynamism had brought Burnell to the edge of the Lake Tskavani' (145). The same question was also raised by Squire in *Life* and equally left unanswered.

Nevertheless Burnell is sceptically honest about people's hidden agendas. While Squire believed the genetic determination for aggression, Burnell believes that 'evolutionary pressures determined that people exploited each other' (77). However, when he observed the moral dilemmas of the Georgian ex-priest on whether to hand the icon over to Burnell or to keep it hidden for the future generations, Burnell 'sympathised with the way the man did not know his own mind. It was a malaise Burnell recognized' (146). He knew the burden that 'having no religious belief forced a man to construct his own morality' (187).When Burnell observes that no one is caring for the old church he is there to enlist, the ex-priest breaks out. 'Many of us care. But we have no means while the world is in such turmoil. We are so poor. […] Why does not the EU help Georgia? […] why do they leave us in such a terrible state? They care for the fabric of the church, yes, but what about our people and our terrible poverty? Why cannot we join the EU?' (123). Burnell has no answer to give when the ex-priest rejects his reference to the killings taking place in Georgia by accusing America with the same and exposing the double standard applied in world politics.

While the cruelty and devastation Burnell experiences are gruesomely depicted, in the newspapers the EU is communicating the war in the Crimea merely 'as a disagreement between Russia and Ukraine' as 'the disruption would cease after various threats and admonitions from the EU Security Council. It was the form of words that the admonition would take which was currently discussed in Brussels and Berlin' (15). The difference between the rhetoric of the European Union and the disillusioning reality, the aching gap between the ruling elite and the everyday people, which were depicted on the level of economy in *Remembrance*, is applied here for the politics. This motif is applied for both politics and economy and taken to the extreme in *Super-State*.

In the Squire Quartet's last book *Super-State: A Novel of a Future Europe* (2002) one of the connecting threads between the characters is the unfolding story of how the now completely united European State (the Super-State) is slowly but unstoppably entering another war in which now Tom Squire's grandson is fighting. In *Super-State*, however, all the pathos has been completely rubbed off and the fight resembles a combat computer game. 'Shoot anyone you see, man or woman or child. They are all enemies. No hesitation' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 204). The hidden

agendas and interests of the World Powers are presented to be incomprehensibly intricate and complex and at the same time greatly depend on the whims and personal moods of the leaders. At the end the most plausible reason why the European Super-State starts the war with the tiny Muslim country (with considerable Christian community) is that they can try out their new fighting planes in action. As Paulus (the only influential character who attempts to act against the war) observes about the head of the army, '[h]e didn't love people […] I saw how he loved those marvellous planes of his, standing waiting on the tarmac. Indeed they are a thrilling sight. Technology made perfect. He wanted to see those terrible birds in flight, and feel himself a part of the machine' (74). Frankenstein's legacy is proven to be inescapable.

As the narrator observes about the feelings of Squire's old love by his death bed, '[a] united Europe was a beautiful dream – certainly moved by the economic considerations of the financiers, but also by the common people of Europe, who had suffered so greatly in the past from their own nationalism and xenophobia. She and they had looked idealistically upon the institution of the EU as one of the gifts of the future, a possible benefaction of peace and a measure of equality – an escape from their cruel European history' (185). She feels 'that idealism was now to be betrayed by the folly of war' and there is no escape (186). This observation gains a highly ironic overtone, when Squire's armed-peace, Cold-War mentality exposed in the previous books is taken into consideration. By the time of the publication of *Super-State* Aldiss, when summarising his spatiotemporal landmarks of European identity, explained that 'those of us who managed to survive the Second World War and the Cold War sense the future has already arrived: the Internet, and the uniting of Europe. There is a great deal of idealism there, as well as simple plain economics. We have many things to digest, including the coining of the word genocide' (Aldiss, cited in Brown). The whole book is a lament over and a farewell to the beliefs, dreams, aspirations and hopes of the previous books.

The archaeologist Professor Daniel Potts, who seems to follow in Squire's intellectual footsteps remarked, 'In the West we live in what our grandparents would have called a material utopia; yet misery plays as large a part in human life as ever' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 86). The novel is a dark dystopia of the Europe dreamed about in the previous novels and so a satirical analysis of the forces

directing the present day European Union. As Zoltán Balázs pointed out, 'utopia belongs more to the belief in progress and enlightenment, while dystopias exist on the disillusionment with or an original scepticism towards progress', which indicates a loss of illusions that runs much deeper than a negative assessment of how the European Union functions (Balázs 1). *Super-Sate* is about the puzzlement over the stupidity and wickedness of the homo sapiens, with Potts's words, 'Is it not saddening, maddening that we have never built a better world? Perhaps we prefer squalor to order' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 86).

The tension that imbues the whole novel is deriving from the conflict of the two realities of the European Union, which exist simultaneously, mirror each other but do not seem to meet significantly. On the one hand, there are the utopistic ideals, ideology of the European Super-State and the remnants of the moral principles of the twentieth century, on the other hand, the harsh reality of every-day living. This fragmentation of the society is also presented in the novel's form, which is completely broken as there are no organising chapters, just short broken episodes from the loosely connected lives of an impressive number of characters. The narrative is further disrupted with snapshots of people in the streets commenting on the events, with television news and adverts. The growing feelings of incomprehension, puzzlement, alienation and disorientation seem to rule the depicted future world. The episodic structure of the book attempts to depict a great range of the European citizens, concerning their nationalities, social and financial standing, beliefs and occupations. This method allows emphasising the enormous split between the leading political, economic and intellectual elites and the everyday people. The novel also sketches the working of the Union at the level of its institutions and its effects on the citizens. It also tries to direct attention to the hiatus between the aspirations and proclaimed agenda and their realization.

The future united Europe is still plagued by 'the human condition' here characterised by greed, racism, stupidity, lack of empathy, intolerance, aggression. Aldiss uses Hannah Arendt's notion discussed in her book *The Human Condition* (1958) and the novel bears signs of Arendt's philosophy mainly in its concerns about the future of humanity. In contrast to Arendt' belief in the faculty of action, in *Super-State*, however, human fate seems to be unavoidable and biologically predestined with individuals having only relative freedom to act and culture,

anyway discredited and reduced to manipulation, has no influence against it. Aldiss further strengthens this notion by the regular conversation of the androids, who closed in cupboards for the night are discussing their daily experiences in the human world. They not only give an outsider's point of view on humans but also a parody of people who believe in themselves as the rulers of the universe. While the androids are discussing the possibility of overtaking the world, they realise that they have no solution even for coming out of the cupboard. What is ridiculed on the level of the androids can also be observed in the characters' lives in all the novels. The strong belief in human progress and commitment to science shared by humanism and transhumanism are invalidated here by bitter irony. As Graham Sleight noted, 'Aldiss wants to use fiction as a vehicle for talking about grand, abstract ideas, but he also wants to tell the stories of individuals. It's in the gap between these two that the irony so characteristic of his work is generated. […] The struggles of Aldiss's protagonists are often made more poignant by our knowledge as readers how much bigger the frame story is' (Sleight).

The androids are also the burlesque representation of the Super-State's citizens' reductive objectification taken to the extreme. In the name of, as Midgley put it, an outside, objective, so-called scientific angle on human relations and behaviour 'it is both convenient and flattering for psychologists to regard other people as mechanisms and themselves as the freely-acting engineers appointed to examine and repair them' (Midgley 61). In the novel the European ruling elite use this scientific legitimisation of unconditional manipulation since 'to ignore the subject's own views about his or her state naturally makes the work much simpler' and more importantly, it also greatly increases the power of those exercising it (61). Midgley emphasised that under the pretension of acting for the good of their "subjects", agents of power can conveniently ignore the 'subjects' own view about what their own good might consist in' (61). 'The democratic committees in Brussels' obsessively introduce rules and regulations to improve the life in the Super-State, for example, making intercourse over the age of fifty-five a chargeable offence in order to curb the growth of population and making certain canonical books obligatory to boost the moral and shared culture among the European citizens' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 41). When people fail to oblige they appoint supervisors to impose fines but the supervisors can be easily bribed,

especially in the East of Europe. Naturally, the ruling elite are not only exempt from these regulations but many characters earn obscene amount of money by producing cheap entertainment and proudly lead promiscuous lives. The starting scene of *Super-State*, which brings into mind the banquet of Europe's elites at the beginning of *Somewhere*, which is a futuristic depiction of a completely out-of-proportion, lavish wedding ceremony, is a burlesque parody of the present EU bureaucracy. The elite directing the Super-State are so alienated from reality, so caught up with appearances, illusions and ceremonies that the bride absent due to her business trip is replaced by an android.

In relation to the aspects of European mentality and aesthetics represented by Aldiss, in *Life a*s a result of his family wealth, social standing and his education, the middle-aged Squire can be taken as the representative of the intelligentsia or the elite in England. As in *Super-State* at Squire's funeral it is clearly explained 'Tom Squire represented all that was liberal in the England that has passed away with him. He was a representative of that inquiring European mind which has given the West such pre-eminence in the world' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 218). On the one hand, he believes in *Life* that 'the traditions of the West, strong and honourable though they are, are insufficient to live by. We have to embrace the new and rise up to change' (Aldiss, *Life* 28). On the other hand, he argues for a historical perspective, the cultivation of which is the responsibility of peoples in North America and Western Europe, who all have privileged backgrounds. 'We must use that privileged background to carry not only our materialism but our liberalism and awareness to the rest of the world' (68). Squire sees his 'deeply privileged' background 'as carrying deep responsibilities – responsibilities for civilized enjoyment as well as duties' and he attributes his 'good fortune' to having spent most of his life maintaining those values he lives for (69). Here Squire's views symbolise the background for the major European cultural crisis which, as Duncan Petrie emphasised, is 'the manner in which the idea of 'European identity' has been maintained in opposition to the underlying diversity and heterogeneity. This identity reflects an 'imagined' community, in Benedict Anderson's sense, of a Europe which posits an essentialist cultural tradition rooted in Judeo-Christian religion, Roman law, Greek ideas on politics, philosophy, art and science, and all refracted through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment' (Petrie 1). Petrie based

on Jan Nederveen Pieterse's[19] observations argues that the crisis arises because this tradition

> promotes itself as being characterised by ideas of high culture, autonomy and liberty, and is frequently contrasted with the cultural traditions of 'others', be they Asia, Africa (both seen as uncultured or barbaric) or in recent times, America (which is characterised by crass populism). Such a conception conveniently overlooks both the diverse reality of cultural forms and cultural differences within Europe (both past and present), and the fact that it was this very European tradition which in the twentieth century generated both fascism and totalitarianism. (Petrie 1)

Although Squire is very popular and respected by many men and women, when getting in close contact with people, he cannot help offending them with his superior and unrelenting views in public while he is also in a constant debate with himself riddled with self-doubt and despair. Many of the ideas are passionately articulated and represented by him while counterarguments equally appear stated by the other characters. The books have the character of a continuous theoretical and philosophical debate running parallel with the reality of the characters' lives and emotional turmoil rendering the debated ideas as well as the characters' present feelings relative and also preserving their complexity by avoiding their closures with ultimate answers and solutions. His beliefs are questioned not only by the younger generation but equally the older ones and the representative of other nationalities. Every statement or belief in the book is immediately refuted by self-doubt, another character's counterargument, or the character's own actions.

Turning to the aesthetic aspect of European identity, Squire is the founder of the Society of Popular Aesthetics and is making a television documentary series based on his book, *Frankenstein Among the Arts*. On the one hand, the title refers not only to Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, but also to Aldiss's tribute novel *Frankenstein Unbound*. In it the protagonist describes the triumph of Frankenstein's 'diseased mentality' over future generations as 'The Conquest of Nature – the loss of man's inner self!' (Aldiss, *Frankenstein* 36) In *Life in the West*

[19] Jan Nederveen Pieterse 'Fictions of Europe' (Pieterse, 'Fiction').

Squire explains that ‘the welter of mass-produced goods which surrounds us can be described as Frankenstein’s legacy’ (Aldiss, *Life* 7). One the other hand, the driving force behind his work is to educate common people about appreciating everyday life as ‘one of his beliefs was that, as the nineteenth century cultivated optimism, often of a rootless kind, so that century’s impoverished heirs and assigns of the twentieth cultivated a pessimism possibly as rootless. The art of enjoyment was lacking’ (293). Squire’s attitude evokes Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) which, as Gagnier concludes ‘offered aesthetics or “Culture” as a solution to anomie, anarchy, and class conflict’ (Gagnier 33). Arnold, however, maybe with the nineteenth-century optimism, offered Culture and aesthetics as means in the hand of the State against ‘the selfish interestedness of competing individuals, classes, and religions’, Squire merely and pessimistically accepts this competitive individualism and tries to make life bearable for the public by the means of finding enjoyment wherever possible (37). Moreover, he also abandons Arnold’s ‘hierarchical, evaluative idea of Culture and aesthetics’ and becomes the promoter of ‘the immense riches […] in everyday life’ (Gagnier 37; Aldiss, *Life* 93). Squire desperately tries to understand ‘not the nature of the arts but the nature of the monster’ who ‘behind all the benevolent arts of living’ is ‘looming, blindly clutching and throttling all that comes within its grasp’, and consequently stops mankind become happier despite the growing living standards, if nowhere else but at least in Europe (174). Although Squire feels that people in Europe do not deserve to be happy ‘while parts of the world are starving and he suspects ‘Morality, Immorality, […] Communism, Capitalism, History, or some deep-rooted biological flaw in human stock’ of being the monster, characteristically of him he fails to arrive to a definite answer (174).

Just when in despair due to his family and emotional troubles, Squire articulates to himself his life-long vocation of promoting the art of enjoyment, the narration abruptly changes to an abstract from a critical review of his work. ‘Thomas Squire – even now no doubt expecting a knighthood for his service to a TV-zapped nation – tries to camouflage a lack of content beneath a middlebrow concern with the surface of trivia; his compulsive dashes about the globe, which reduce all space and time to a corner of the studio, are physical analogues of his efforts to cover dozens of subjects in order to conceal the fact that he has no

subject' (283-284). Here the allegorical use of Squire's name becomes most apparent in its ironical sense. The service Squire performs in the hope of knighthood becomes a promotion of the vulgarised notion of European culture. He, despite being defined by the house, the land, the title he inherited, is on the fruitless quest for real content of life and culture. His obsessive travels imply his permanent in-between position concerning places, classes and cultural values. However, even this spot-on observation abstract published under the title 'Frankesquire Among the Parts' is rendered doubtful by the fact that was written by Squire's previous love interest, who he had also left for the sake of his marriage despite being deeply in love. The erotic and the political are inseparably connected not only in Squire's thinking but in the world's mentality, as it can be observed in the conference male members' attitude towards the few female participants.

As observed, Squire is, just as his thoughts are, constantly on the go, pursuing his mission of the art of enjoyment, although all he seems to long for is stability and peace, which he can achieve only momentarily by his short yoga exercises. Aldiss creates the impression, just as in the case of Singapore, that the East has many things to offer to Europe beyond her so-called civilisation. The whole book has a restless nature full of the voices of the characters and the inner debates of the protagonist while Squire only desires silence. As Colin Greenland observed, what Aldiss 'wishes to communicate is a highly modern uncertainty; the complicity of personality and other imprecision in all things' (Greenland 75). With the arrival of modern media the amount of information has grown beyond proportion while its trustworthiness and human ability to process and make sense of it have not followed. Aldiss's characters desperately aspire for an understanding of their situation, their position in the local and global communities and although they seem to advance towards it with great difficulties, they never achieve it and therefore any mental or moral equilibrium stays out of their reach. With Greenland's words, 'Aldiss's "resolutions" only enable the character to stand up straight and face the enormous future, awful or unknown, which is just about to start' (75). Greenland writes about Aldiss's more traditional science fiction novels but in the Squire Quartet's books the unresolved narrative tensions and dilemmas deriving from the past and present of European society and the facing up to the integral and irredeemable nature of mankind also cast a shadow over the future.

The influence of modern media and communication is also a recurrent theme in the novels. Television as the information source is greatly discussed in *Life*, which starts with the image that all 'over the European Economic Community, eight o'clock […] Television screens brighten everywhere…hundreds of them, thousands, millions, the characteristic burning to ward off the terrors of ancient night. […] The global village enjoys its nightly catharsis of violence or *Kultur*' (Aldiss, *Life* 1). The ironic usage of the German expression 'Kultur' here probably refers to an idealised but highly authoritarian and chauvinistic cultural perspective. Moreover, that culture is something constructed and imposed on people from above with the means of mass media, which results in the elimination of diversity and uniformity of taste in Europe. The term catharsis is especially sarcastic in the light of Squire's desperate and hopeless search for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual absolution. The catharsis of violence, in addition and in opposition to the catharsis of this narrow and negative notion of culture, which is only a spectacle of others' sufferings enjoyed in a safe distance from them in the safety of Europe, is all people have managed to come up with against the ancient tragedies and uncertainties of human existence. This opposition of violence and Kultur also foreshadows the tension between the proclaimed European cultural values and the European reality.

Squire, however, still believes in television as an art medium that 'touches everyone' and wants 'to produce a cultural statement' that helps everyone in the world (94). This bumptious aspiration represents his and Britain's self-centred attitude towards the world, but Squire argues for respecting television's power and influence and so developing it. Meanwhile, even Squire does not believe in a global society created by modern media. He cannot accept the reasoning of his nephew and his friends, who seem to represent the next generation, against nuclear power as it affects the whole world's environment and their call for nuclear disarmament as they claim to have learnt from the past wars and wish to junk off 'old emotions like patriotism which did so much damage' (98). His nephew challenges Squire saying that 'the world is really becoming one – something you talk about but can't understand. I can feel as much sympathy for an oppressed Greek or Chilean as I can for my next-door neighbour' (98). Squire, however, points out that no real, trustworthy information and so knowledge is available stating that '[b]ut, you

probably know damn all about the actual problems of people in Greece or Chile. You have just read a paragraph or two in some newspaper or seen something on TV' (98). Moreover, Squire is also accusing them of idealism when dreaming of a 'better, fairer world' and with evading real responsibilities in a divided and hostile humanity.

Burnell during his journey is searching for his stolen 10-year memory, which makes the book also an investigation of the nature of personal and community remembering, which gains special significance in the post Cold War time. In the story the memories removed from the brain by e-mnemonicvision technique are reproduced for entertainment. E-mnemonicvision is Aldiss's futuristic version for the Internet and virtual reality. As it has proved to be addictive for the viewers, poor people have been forced to sell their memories, and people with potentially marketable memories have been robbed of their experiences, it has to be banned or restricted in many countries; consequently, the black market and a crime industry are flourishing, especially in Eastern Europe. Moreover, 'a vogue of the permanent insertion of seemingly life-enhancing memory implants was yielding up a new generation of mental cases whose assumed memories did not fit their own personality patterns' (Aldiss, *Somewhere* 44). E-mnemonicvision poses the question of identity and its major components as memories from one's past are the core on which identity is formed. Which is just as true concerning an individual as it is in relation to nations. The memory theft occurs to Burnell in Eastern-Europe where, as Kertész presented, the communist regimes regularly rewrote history, erased certain facts and people out of the official versions of events and replaced them with suitable lies. This lack of continuity and comprehensible image of the past resulted in broken, fragmented memory both on individual and national levels.

The growing alienation caused by the world's incomprehension and disorientation in *Super-State* is further strengthened by the messages from a spaceship heading towards Jupiter's satellite called Europa, which is encountering difficulties and losing touch with the Earth and so with increasing desperation is asking for some response. The primary purpose of the space travel is to find life in the universe apart from the Earth. Moving away from our planet is always a means for Aldiss to emphasise the Earth's position as one among the heavenly bodies but also its home status visualised through the eyes of the astronauts. In the whole

novel the astronauts and their quest are treated as the symbols of human progress and the triumph of science, or even the search and the reestablishment of the lost ideals of humanity in contrast with people's mundane and selfish actions in the European Super-State. Not by accident their destination, the place where life is hoped to be found is called Europa. Aldiss, however, turns the up-down imagery of the ground and the sky and its moral dimensions of lofty and down-to-earth attitudes upside-down. The astronauts, after having endured enormous difficulties and hardship and located alien life, immediately destroy the life on Europa obeying one of the most basic animal instincts in order to survive starvation. It is also characteristic of Aldiss that the search of the universe, which is presented as the only task that unites nations (as can be seen in the negotiations with China) and lifts them above the level of their petty, mundane businesses and quarrels on the Earth, the vicious circle they do not seem to be able to escape, results in the encounter with a worm-like creature. As it is observed after the crew's Christmas dinner which is made of the only other life in the universe, 'Living organisms survive by egotism. The liver fluke believes itself lord of creation' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 230).

A further disruptive aspect is the bullet broadcast to the residents of the EU by, as the characters believe, a subversive anarchist group called 'The Insanatics'. Their philosophical analyses on the affairs of the Super-State expose the contradictions and self-delusion not only of the characters but also of the readers and propose uncomfortable and disturbing questions concerning the lives they and we lead. Moreover, they are deliberately confusing and difficult to interpret with their associative and intuitive trains of thought. Until the middle of the book the reader just as the characters have not got a clue who are behind these messages, which start to serve as a kind of moral conscience, a sensible and powerful guiding voice. However, this illusion is shattered at least for the readers when it is revealed that they are created by a burnt-out, frustrated university lecturer as 'the most remarkable computer virus yet devised', which no one could detect. He lives a miserable mundane life with his 8-year-old son who is addicted to murderous computer games. This narrative technique undermines any easy moralisation and highlights the difference between rhetoric and reality. Therefore, the utopian ideals are also questioned as not only some imaginary impossibilities but also as mere

rhetorical patterns that can be used and reused independently of their real significance. The bullet points commonly appear in the flow of television advertisements and as they are printed with the same letter type their linguistic and rhetorical similarity is also emphasised directing the attention to their ready-made patterns of thought.

Gabbo, who represents the figure of the enormously-rich, ruthless entrepreneurs of Europe, manipulates people with his financial influence and takes pleasure in playing brutally cruel jokes on the characters. He proudly justifies their vicious deeds stating that he is 'the sniggering face of capitalism' and quotes 'that human life is a tragedy to those who feel, a comedy to those who think' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 229). Their mischief when they 'persuaded some ancient professor of archaeology stuck in Budapest that the galaxy was swarming with intelligent life and they used earth as a prison planet' ends with Professor Daniel Potts's suicide. The concept that our mother Earth is only 'a prison planet' to which galactic criminals and madmen were sent' can be seen as an interpretation of the Christian argument about the Earth and Heaven division, in which God is a prison guard (167). Meanwhile, Gabbo himself believes, that '[a]s long as one is aware one is living on a largely criminal planet, enjoyment is rather a limited occupation' (4-5). Squire's mission of promoting the art of enjoyment is completely disfigured by Gabbo and his creature Obbagi, a shockingly intelligent and strong but faceless robot, as so many times by the ruling elite in European history. By abusing their power they are experimenting and playing with the lives of people. The disastrous conviction in, what Midgley terms, 'the alienation of the human operator from the system he works on' as if he or she could stay outside the system, be independent of the forces that shape everything around him or her, is detectable in the Super-state leaders' treatment of their citizens, the environmental consequences of the misuse of the natural resources and war on Tibaru (Midgley 163). Frankenstein's legacy, when the creature destroys the creator cannot be escaped. Obbagi can also be seen as the embodiment of the perfect scientific approach to life. He has no feelings, his thoughts and words convey faultless logic, he is not burdened by moral principles so can project a completely utilitarian image of the European life and evokes Nietzsche's Last Man. While the androids are also represented as the counterpoint to nature, Mother Nature herself in the Super-State has, however,

become due to her own creature, the human species, a completely alien environment, with unbearable heat, disappearing seasons and large-scale natural disasters.

In the Quartet's volumes environmental issues appear as increasingly present threats but even in *Somewhere* the report that a nuclear power station's reactor in Bulgaria is melting down through the Earth's crust leading to 'the evacuation of urban Bulgaria and the lower Danube basin' is treated by Burnell as another piece of interesting information among the common worrisome news regularly appearing in the media. However, in *Super-State* the characters have to cope as everyday reality with the results of environmental damage as at Thomas Squire's funeral it is clearly explained. 'One of his accomplishments was to hold on to our beloved Pippet Hall, in bad times and good. Now it's the elements that threaten us – elements that have been roused by mankind's inability to discipline its needs' (Aldiss, *Super-State* 218).

The attempts to reduce human existence to mere science in all of the books of the Square Quartet, to claim that 'there are no spiritual forces acting on human beings from the outside' result in an aching gap of explanation for the spiritual experiences encountered by the characters and the realization that the transcendental aspect of human life cannot 'plausibly be reduced to illicit wish-fulfilment for an afterlife' (Midgley 62). The desire to find a liveable answer remains in the need for both a universal ethic and an acceptable code of living. In the European Super-State among the common people there seems to be a general social breakdown resulting from a helpless lack of moral direction, from a general feeling of being manipulated by the authorities and from the consequent fatalism. Despite the authorities' attempts to exercise total control the necessity of ordinary existence to possess ideals by which people can live remains. Christian religious fundamentalism and hatred seem to be growing and result in the murder of a ten-year-old girl by her uncle in the life of one of the poor families presented in the book. (Aldiss, *Super-State* 41) This family from Britain have moved to the land in former Romania to gain the agricultural subsidy of the Super-State but are forced to follow pointless European rules to be entitled even for a meagre income. However, life is difficult not only in the Eastern part as another poverty stricken family with Daniel Potts's abandoned wife and drug-addict daughter lives in

England. His daughter after giving birth to a still-born child commits suicide placing every lofty moral of the archaeologist immediately under doubt. Religion in Super-State is generally presented as hostility and hatred behind sanctimonious preaching on the level of institutions starting from the sinking of the boat full of Muslim refugees through the war started against the tiny Muslim country and on the individual level through the personal stories of the two Muslim refugees forced into terrorism. It seems that Aldiss attempted to show individual stories behind the news about terrorist attacks and, at the same time, remain politically correct. The two main Muslim characters as fundamentally good and moral men having escaped the tortures and the spiritual and mental backwardness of their respective homelands come to the European Super-State with high hopes. They are both treated unjustly and forced into terrorism by other sketchily represented Muslim characters and find absolution only in the love of European women. However, both of them die probably to highlight the impossibility of their position as good Muslims in Europe. As one of them states, 'I escaped from a Muslim community in Africa. I wish with all my heart for European culture. More open. More scientific. More humane. I wish to learn your enlightened philosophy. I am three months in your super-state and then I find myself locked here, in prison. Here is cruelty. Terrible racism. […] Is racism temporary? Is this prison temporary? Only me – I am temporary' (52).

As the male protagonists for Aldiss embody Britain's elite mentality and the different generations of her middle-class (the working class only appear as side characters), women are presented as cultural symbols and always only in relation to the men. Squire leading and promoting a hedonistic lifestyle with many love affairs is also trying to make up with his separated wife and so to restore his family's ancient home and tradition. Aldiss not only exploits the house as a traditional Freudian symbol for women, but for Squire his wife and his home become inseparable as the symbols of his inherited way of life, his title, his homeland, his social role, his responsibilities. Therefore, female relationships for him involve a continuous debate between responsibility and self-fulfilment, a constant source of guilt or as Milicia pointed out, 'tension between yearning for freedom and attraction to the restraining force' (Milicia). The emotions of responsibility and guilt, however, have a more profound significance and are again

parts of Frankenstein's legacy. As in *Frankenstein Unbound* Frankenstein laments over his desire 'to wrest from Mother Nature some of her deepest secrets, however dark the passage down' which he might tread (Aldiss, *Frankenstein* 42). He claims that he does not care for himself, only for the truth and to 'improve the world, to deliver into man's hands some of those powers which had hitherto been ascribed to a snivelling and fictitious God' (42). In his atheist world the notion of sin has lost its meaning but he believes in guilt and that it is a permanent condition 'with all men in their secret hearts' as man's power and achievement carries 'the maggot of guilt in it' (42). Frankenstein also feels that guilt might result from 'the nature of his conception' as 'the intense pleasure which procreation gives is the moment when human beings shed their humanity and become as the animals, mindless, sniffling, licking, grunting, copulating' (43). This dual notion of guilt is a continuous interplay in Squire's life and it is not by accident that he discovers to his great shock that his wife has left him due to his present and past love affairs right after a debate with his young relative on the environmental effects of nuclear power and the risks of nuclear disarmament, when Squire lectures on the evasion of responsibility in the case of the disarmament. He nevertheless follows an archetype as he cannot help his instinct of using every opportunity to lose himself and so to escape from the suffocating maternal domination expressed by his wife and home and seems to posses his insatiable drive to venture into the unknown, let it be a new woman, a novel idea or a fresh location, because of the struggle at home is too much for him (Milicia). Squire's, and the other male protagonists' ambivalent feelings about freedom and possession or being possessed are further expressed in many images, the majority of them sexual, throughout the Squire Quartet novels, highlighting the tensions between 'the need to be enclosed and the need to be unfettered' (Milicia). This tension and its inherent symbolism can be also applied for Europa as a woman, to whom to belong and be a part of her is as appealing as threatening. The possession of the woman and Europa is also a recurrent theme. These issues symbolically concerning women bring up the triple function of borders: to create barriers, to contain but also to enable contact.

Despite the fact that Great Britain seems to stand for the past from which he has escaped, Burnell is, on the one hand, a representative of a new generation of homeless global people, on the other hand, the representative of Britain. Burnell's

love interest, the ‘enlightened’ French-born lady working and living in Spain can be seen as the representation of the European Union. ‘Elegant, in full control, moderately famous, one of the modern ladies of a united Europe’ (Aldiss, *Somewhere* 10). Blanche identifies herself ‘I speak German and Spanish – in fact, Castilian – more frequently than I do French. I don’t regard myself as particularly French any more. I belong to the Community’ (7). The linguistic knowledge and the character’s choice of language have significance in the whole book. Blanche insists on distinguishing Castilian from Spanish emphasising probably the usage of the “pure” Spanish deriving from her position. Burnell, who speaks half a dozen languages, is already at the beginning of the novel a ‘footloose creature’ and refuses Blanche’s invitation for a more stable relationship with his inability to learn Spanish (7). Although having been divorced for years he cannot detach himself completely from his ex-wife Stephanie, who is now married to an American millionaire, lives in the USA and has already acquired an American accent. When thinking about Blanche’s offer he wonders ‘[w]hat would it feel like to love, to have continuous intercourse with, another woman, while Stephanie remained as much part of his interior monologue as a separating language? […] How could England ever become genuinely part of the European Community while its language kept the USA ever in mind?’ (11).

Blanche, behind her official EU façade, seems to be the representative also for the motherly and unrestricted love so offers an alternative, escape route from Burnell’s desolate world. She is the one who puts forward the suggestion that ‘most of the great hoard of the world’s evil, and particularly the violence of men, could be swept away in one generation, if only today’s children could feel loved and secure; perhaps the secret of all virtue lay hidden in a tit, a parental lap’ (190). She is also the one who devotedly and hopelessly loves Burnell. ‘Love still held its formidable attractions in an age in which a whole stew pot of belief simmered – rationality, romanticism, economic factors, faith, crass commercialism, asceticism, a thousand isms’ (192).

Aldiss takes the analogy of women and European Union further when Burnell contemplates German domination in the EU in relation to a German female character, a prostitute. ‘She led the way. Burnell followed, admiring the jaunty buttocks, smooth as machine parts. He had always liked the Germans, not least

because his father hated them' (78). While on the surface Burnell seems to rebel against the previous generation, he nevertheless follows the same structures, let it be his attitude towards and relationship with women or his stereotypical thinking. 'The neatness of German towns, where modernity sat comfortably with antiquity, had been achieved nowhere else in Europe. In the same way, a Teutonic drive towards success – success in all things – was moderated by an everyday courtesy' (78). The whole analogy develops into a burlesque when Burnell expands it into an erotic mapping of Europe in which Germany possesses the 'Teutonic wholeheartedness'. 'He understood well that national wholeheartedness had led Germany into disastrous follies in the past, just as it had led to leadership in Europe in the present; still he found that wholeheartedness admirable: not only in economic life, but in bed' (78).

Although Burnell is ready to think in national stereotypes, he feels out of place in Britain because for him 'everything seems to come in quotes nowadays. It all seems old-fashioned. […], things maintained for tourists, like "The Changing of the Guard". People still have, insist on, "toast and marmalade" for breakfast. They "drive down to the coast". They go to "the RA private view" and in "the season" they attend what they still call "Royal Ascot". … My father still likes his "cup of tea", and talks of Europe as "the Continent" (11). Nevertheless, Blanche reminds him that he talks only about the privileged and however much he dislikes his upper-class upbringing, it is still bred in him and that makes him so self-contained and so quaint. Burnell points out to her that it is equally true about her nation. Although Burnell is so sceptical about his British heritage and upbringing and in the whole book he is far away from his country, his real quest is also for home. He is convinced that he can find rest if he can replace the missing part of his past and by this gain an understanding of his story and himself. The tragedy is, what the reader knows but he is unaware of, that regaining his past will not alter significantly either his existence or the tragic events and human experiences he encounters. Being an observer, however involved and real he might be, seems to bring nothing but disillusionment, displacement and psychological trouble. Burnell, while searching for his lost years, 'the bullet', also goes off to travel to forget his loss of memory and identity. Many people during his journey warn him that forgetting is more difficult than remembering and maybe more beneficial as well. One of them is

Thomas Squire who assures Burnell as ‘a benevolent if presumptuous friend of an earlier generation’ that hell is not forgetting but remembering. Remembering what asses we were – and therefore still are’ (354). Burnell’s search for home, belonging and identity resembles the European debate over the preservation and protection of European heritage and over defining the fundamental elements of its culture in order to sustain its identity.

Once Burnell has returned home, he wonders whether his search is no more than a nostalgic longing for his lost youth and how much of his dislocation is his alone and not ‘part of a general global malaise, people rejoice everywhere in their youth, and the hopes which are the very bloodstream of youth: yet when all that fades the general state of affairs is seen to be no better, the sum total of human happiness is greater’ (*Somewhere* 364, 365). His indecision between Stephanie and Blanche here is represented as being caught between a nostalgia for the past and the temptation of present enjoyment. His momentary decision of choosing Blanche and the careless pleasures as there is ‘time enough to worry about the state of the world later – that is an old man’s job’ is immediately taken back with the self-observation that he is always hanging about. He asks himself, ‘How about doing something for the common good? Anything’ (365).

The final words uttered by Burnell are addressed to his wife inviting her to restart their lives together ‘you score more points than you know for gaining self-knowledge. Of course it was painful – it’s meant to be, so you remember the lesson. And we live in a world where love is scarce and almost always has to be earned and re-earned, and besides […]’ (390). This ending very much resembles Thomas Squire’s final decision concerning his marriage but while Squire returns to the family’s ancient home, here Burnell disappears and his family are too engaged in playing the traditional family game, ‘the old contest’ of world trade to realize his disappearance (390).

‘To – well, it sounds terribly religious – to bear witness. That’s what I intend by the Squire Quartet’ (Aldiss, ‘Remembrance’ 134). He was referring to his life, mystical experiences, his personal spiritual development, and his ‘quarrel’ with his native land. He wrote ‘to express an inner life needing voice’ (129). To bear witness, to make sense, to interpret, to overcome, and to learn from the personal and historic experiences and memories are the aim of all writers in the thesis.

Aldiss, just as László Végel, turns his attention to the role of individual and collective memory and its effect on the life of people, nations and Europe. They are both fascinated by the repetition of patterns in European history, the destructive tendency of her nations, and the individuals who are searching for meaning and purpose for life behind the prevailing senselessness, who are trying to narrate their stories in ways that would transform them into destinies.

Chapter 4

From the Periphery of the Periphery

Végel László lives in and writes about Újvidék (Novi Sad) and Vajdaság (Vojvodina) [20] but believes that 'Újvidék is an almost paradigmatically Central European story' as many cities and towns 'on the periphery of the region, on the periphery and all the periphery [of Europe] live a life, like people in Újvidék, full of conflicts, full of illusions and tragedies' (Végel, 'Tömegsírok'). Végel looks at Újvidék as a place on the borderline between the Balkans and Central Europe with a multi-ethnic culture from the era of the Habsburg Monarchy but with more and more characteristics typical of the Balkans. While the Balkans, according to Végel, is mainly and pejoratively known for its inclination towards fragmentation, and impinges on particular interests around which the fights escalate, what he is really interested in is his own Balkan image. In his Balkans 'the people's nature is more open, and they express their intentions more clearly […], they show themselves more transparently than the people of Central-Europe do, where there is much more pretence, ostentation, hiding behind the various roles' (Végel, 'Balkáni'). He finds the Balkans a 'more straightforward world' in every relation, such as, in everyday life, 'in war and peace, in love and hatred' (Végel, 'Balkáni').

His work is engaged with the legacy of the Habsburg Monarchy, the bourgeois[21] of the towns built on the living-together of diverse cultures, and some kind of East-Central European unity. For Végel Yugoslavia, just as the Monarchy, represented a 'small Europe with a multicolour, diverse world' and he feels that both the Monarchy and Yugoslavia belong to his intellectual heritage and finds the survival of this East-Central European tradition vital, especially in his home city,

[20] Novi Sad is the Serbian name of the city that is the second largest city in Serbia. However, as naming and language have a special significance in Végel's works and since he, as a member of the Hungarian minority, would call it in his native tongue Újvidék, I decided to use the Hungarian name of the city in my English translations. I abandoned this rule, however, in the case of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina as it is used considerably less frequently in Végel's works.

[21] The expression "polgár", which I translated into" bourgeois" for want of better, represents in Hungary and in its former territories an absolutely positive system of values without the Marxist connotations of the expression. The emphasis is on political and social independence and not so much on work ethic and economic principles as it might be the case in relation to the middle-class.

which in the past represented the golden mean incorporating something both from the Balkans and Central-Europe (Károlyi and Végel 388; Végel, in Vári). Presently the whole Central and East-Central European area, where the focus is on the construction of nation-states, tries to get rid of this ambivalent heritage, its past. To stop the disappearance of this multi-ethnic tradition of the city, Végel can see only one tiny chance in the form of the accession of Serbia to the European Union, 'when it could join into a kind of circuit into which it used to belong during its golden days' (Végel, in Vári).

Végel believes that the traditional minority identity and the multi-ethnic existence hold values not only for the cultures involved but it serves for the edification of the coming multicultural societies, as well. He, however, advocates against a passive role for the minority existence and for an active formation of its identity:

> A person from a minority group cannot live as the citizen in one world while they as the beholder of cultural values have to wander to another world. It inevitably creates the minority schizophrenia. If this happens, they are able only to complain and to comfort themselves with the culture of the mother country and consider their own culture as the culture of agony. They have to defend themselves against this by taking on being européer […]. They are creators, therefore, they assume their own culture. Which is not agony only in that case if it has the nature of creation. Anyone who does not acknowledge this exiles irresponsibly the minority identity politics into the field of the apocryphal[22] ethnocentrism. (Végel, 'Hontalan')

Végel believes that 'minorities are the pioneers of Europe', 'the outposts of European metropolises' as they mean the wealth, 'diversity and complexity of human fates' (Végel, in Károlyi 387). Minority existence forces a person to face daily the question of national identification' and in it 'absurd compromises are born, there exist concessions for the sake of survival, the intricate self-reflexive situations create flexible persistence' (387). Végel referring to Deleuze and Guattari states that 'the real undertaking is to exist as a stranger within our own language, and to perceive the world and ourselves from this position' (387). Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* reflects on Kafka's impossibilities of writing

[22] "Apocryphal" for Végel means, referring to the religious usage, a hidden, not openly declared part of any canon, which can refer to literary, political and social phenomena.

discussed already in the interpretation of Kertész and observes that the minority position allows the realization that a language is 'a schizophrenic mélange, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centres of power are played out, blurring what can be said and what can't be said; one function will be played off against the other, all the degrees of territoriality and relative deterritorialization will be played out' (Deleuze and Guattari 26). Here this schizophrenic condition, 'the polylingualism of one's own language' and situation is welcomed and the creative act mentioned by Végel is to 'make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture and underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play' (27). The line of escape from the machine, which for Kafka's characters often meant metamorphoses, the symbolic escape from territorialisation and reterritorialisation, for Végel, just as for Kertész and, as I will prove later, for Németh, is the position of the européer. As Deleuze and Guattari argue in the case of Kafka's ape 'it isn't a question of liberty as against submission' but an act of deterritorialisation, a way out of the machine while still being part of it (6). This position which used to be embodied and represented in the symbolic condition of the 'Jew', is turned from an inescapable burden into a desirable state, an intellectual and moral stand.

Deleuze and Guattari identify three characteristics of minor literature. The first is that since a minor literature does not 'come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' therefore 'in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation' (16). Végel further refines this characteristic when he differentiates between minority and periphery literature. Just as for the colonial and postcolonial period for Britain, Trianon[23], as Végel identifies, 'is not only history but also culture, moreover, as culture it remains alive even when it has lost its force as history' (Végel, 'Peremregény'). Végel's observations about the literary consequence of the survival of Trianon as a cultural trauma concerning the minority literatures can be seen in relation to the European

[23] The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 is still considered as the most tragic event in the history of Hungary and has been seen as an imposed re-definition of the Kingdom of Hungary as a geographically more limited state leaving around thirty percent of the Hungarians outside its borders.

centre's relation to the countries in the Eastern periphery. Because of the living culture of Trianon the official Hungarian literary centre considers minority literature as 'its pampered exotic' and 'accepts difference but only at the level of the story, the story of suffering' while in every other aspect the centre's canons dominate (Végel, 'Peremregény'). Végel, however, differentiates the periphery novel from the minority novel, which accepts the central system of rules, in the sense that the periphery novel alters the canons by challenging the illusion of a unified space and so drawing attention to the problematic position of the periphery. While the minority literature's topic differs only from the centre, the periphery literature uses a completely divergent way of narration as 'the space and home of the words' are different and words are often verified not by their meanings 'but the space hiding behind them' (Végel, 'Peremregény').

Deleuze and Guattari's two other characteristics of minority literature: that 'everything in them is political' and 'in them everything takes on a collective value' can be distinctively observed in Végel's works (17). Every historical event becomes the symbol of common people's everyday struggles against the great forces of history while Végel continuously attempts to expose the machinery oppressing common people and its logic, which also penetrates into the personal relationships.

As the writer summarises, his first book in his Újvidék trilogy, *Bűnhődés* (Atonement) published in 2012 'depicts a road leading from the Balkans to Europe' both physically and mentally and 'presents Europe from the view of a worm, a passenger attendant is my Virgil and the image of some kind of underground Europe materialises. There is no mentioning any more of that ceremonial, representative intellectual discourse' (Károlyi and Végel, 384; Végel, in Vári). Imre Payer in his article entitled 'The crisis of a European Union citizen in his or her attempt for identity congruence' identifies the central theme as the question of 'how someone as a member of a minority in the periphery can form a national or European identity' (Payer).

The book has three parts which are separate and self-contained but still form a unity. The two shorter essays surrounding the middle part, which is the longest and has given the title to the book, had been previously published

elsewhere. The first 'Nach Berlin'[24] is an atmospheric introduction, which flashes up the problems to be investigated. The wandering in Berlin illustrates the feeling of being 'a European bastard', in other words, an East-Central European (Végel, *Bűnhődés* 14). Being the 'bastard', the illegitimate and not culturally rightful offspring of Europe, as it has been explained in the case of Kertész, is an obsession to compensate and to conform. The reader unintentionally becomes part of the narrator's wandering through the second-person narration form. 'You find yourself by accident in a rundown, dirty part of the city, you overhear familiar voices; it is here where the guest workers from Asia, the Balkans, and from the sides of the Danube live, loiter in cheap pubs, longing for home, while they are apprehensive of being driven out some day' (8). The narrator draws the reader in even further when he admits that 'they can speak your language, but you do not reveal your identity, you are ashamed of yourself since you realise that eventually you are just like them. A mental slave' (8). Moreover, some of 'the voluntary European slaves' sell not only their souls but their bodies as well, while the German 'drunken patriots' find the 'barbarian meat, the hug of the barbarian women' overpriced (8). The frustration and anger penetrating through the use of language, magnifies the contrast with Aldiss's portrayal of Eastern-European prostitutes. Végel's use of the second-person narration form also creates the feeling that the narrator is in a continuous discussion, debate with himself, which feeling is further strengthened by the major themes and ideas returning again and again in the whole book as if the narrator were not able to understand and answer the issues raised and so were forced to return back to them compulsively.

The physical movement of the narrator is accompanied by the restless rumbling of the mind of the East-Central European thinker who is immerging into the cultural and civil milieu, the experience of which was earlier only a distant dream for him. He, however, immediately, realises his foreign position and so it leads him to being crushed by his dreams and his reality and so the past, present and future of the peripheral European existence. The centre/periphery model becomes representative, but there is no real connection between the parts of this dualism. 'You have lost your home as at the periphery you were longing for the real

[24] The German expression can carry a dual meaning. On the one hand it means 'towards Berlin' as a glorious goal but also 'after Berlin' implying an aftermath.

Europe, you have lost Europe as she does not know her own periphery' (9). The periphery is, however, also a non-place, a pathological fiction. 'A false game, according to which we are beguiling ourselves as we have never had our own face. We live in a perpetual schizophrenia'(44). This is the source of the poses, insecurities, convulsive inferiority feelings.

> You put the fantasy called Europe to the test. […] You are the offspring of the one-party system, you could not avoid its influence, it determined you even when you were taking issue with it. The utopian road has turned into the road to Damascus. You have resigned to the fact that it has ultimately determined your life. You can no longer start anything from the beginning. You have arrived in Berlin with the experience of this failure: with the unredeemable guilt of the son having wasted himself. (44)

The realisation of the tension between geographical, cultural, historical determinism and free will to act is a constant theme of European thinking as it has appeared in Kertész and Aldiss and in relation to destiny will be further discussed in Parks.

The narrator visits the Berlin Wall in 1988, the great symbol of the division of Europe, the secret of which, according to him, is that it shows such an apocryphal history that is really valid and different from the official lies. 'The atmosphere of the Western part was reminiscent of a nonsensical idyll', while he could observe the East German soldiers guarding the other side (23). 'In this ambivalence I faced another one, the apocryphal history unfolding from the platform in front of the Brandenburg Gate […] At the foot of the Berlin Wall looking at it from the platform I got the feeling as if vitriol had been thrown into my face' (23). However, when on the 9 November 1989 the narrator learns from the night news about the fall of the Wall, he realises that this has come too late in his life and his personal history 'will not change significantly because of [this event]' (16). He, just as Squire and Burnell in Aldiss's novels, has been irrevocably determined by the Cold War and it has become irreversibly part of his personality and mentality.

The introductory part of the novel is not only a summary of the prospective themes but it also helps the reader to take in the middle section, also entitled 'Bűnhődés' (Atonement), as someone from the periphery despite the fact that in

the following part the first-person narration is the dominant (Balogh, Nem). This longest part comes nearest to the genre defined on the book cover, ‘diary novel’. Payer observes that here ‘the tradition of the revived anecdote genre is mixed with the analytical character of the essay; the latter provides perspective and depth for the former’ (Prayer). Despite the essay-style writing, the novel form is also definite and its fragmentation and confession-like character recall the diary form. The autobiographical style is not for its own sake: through the individual life the reader can get an insight into the condition of having several states or/and of statelessness. One of the main motifs in Végel’s thinking is the tension vibrating between being the citizen of more than one state and the feeling of belonging to nowhere. He invented the expression of ‘stateless local- patriot’ to describe his Hungarian minority position in the multi-national, multi-cultured, multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. While he still considers it valid, the meaning of this identification was altered significantly during the Yugoslav Wars, ‘when statelessness became an everyday experience and local-patriotism absurd’ (Végel, ‘Egy’). In contrast with a civil war, when participants can choose between the ideologies or remain an outsider, he feels that in an ethnic war ‘a person cannot decide freely, this kind of war casts out those who do not belong to the great stories of the opposing sites. Consequently, this war dispossesses of their home state those who were not born into any of the great national stories, and any of the collectivities’ (Végel, ‘Egy’). Only these people ‘who have been expelled from the great collective narrative, who have been sentenced to exile and who consequently retain their sanity and personal autonomy’ remain individuals but have to pay the price for it with statelessness (Végel, ‘Egy’).

The narrator’s overview of his life shows more similarities with a meandering, spoken memoir than with a chronological diary. So the childhood reminiscence about the adults’ ambivalent attitudes towards the Germans invisibly becomes a summary of a Yugoslavian- German writers’ meeting in 1988, the thoughts starting off from the Caffé San Marco in Trieste[25] covering the several-decade history of the Dornstädter patisserie in Újvidék. The memories

[25] Trieste has a symbolic status because of its location in the crossroads of Latin, Slavic and Germanic cultures and also due to its cultural significance in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the fourth largest city (after Vienna, Budapest and Prague).

associatively linked serve as illustrations for the writer's train of reflections. While at first the book as a whole might appear to be a loosely connected chain of parts with diverse tone and style, the novel's unity is created by the recurrent motifs. One of these is the Dornstädter patisserie, through the history of which an insight into the last seventy years' history of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Hungary can be gained. This reminiscence can occasionally seem nostalgic but among the pleasant memories the past's atrocities swept under the carpet emerge, for example the recollections of the German-Hungarian mass graves, into which members of the narrator's family had also been buried. The fate of the patisserie, which during its heyday invoked the atmosphere of the Viennese coffee houses, is also allegorical and appears in all the three books of the trilogy. For Végel the Dornstädter patisserie is a symbol of the embourgeoisement process in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As the writer in an interview summarised the real life story of the patisserie, in 1912 'a gentleman called Dornstädter' 'who was known for coming from Slovakia and being somewhat Jewish, somewhat also German and somewhat also Hungarian' wanted to start a bourgeois coffee house in Újvidék and believed that 'it is not the nationality what matters but the quality of the Sacher cake' (Végel, Balkán). Even when the tension was growing in the 1930s he kept working and fighting for 'a bourgeois standard, a kind of individualism', and to preserve his patisserie as 'a bourgeois gathering place' (Végel, 'Balkán'). In this region he represented a utopian possibility until his mysterious and sudden disappearance during the Second World War (Végel, 'Balkán'). After the War the symbolic gesture of the extermination of the bourgeois took place behind the Dornstädter's windows when, as it is gruesomely depicted in Végel's later novel *Neoplanta*, German and Hungarian women considered bourgeois were mass raped by Russian soldiers and Yugoslavian partisans.

The narrator comparing the San Marco in Trieste with the Dornstädter in Újvidék wonders what the significance is behind the fact that 'the San Marco has remained always San Marco, while the Dornstädter has been changing its name according to the whims of the political interest, just like the streets and institutions' (Végel, *Bűnhődés* 81). The Dornstädter in 1945, when the prosecution of the German minority started, was renamed as Moscow to strengthen the Soviet friendship. However, in 1948 due to the conflict between Tito and Stalin it was

given the name of Zagreb and after the Balkan Wars Athens. During these political changes 'the internal milieu, however, had been more and more breaking down with time until it started to look like a railway station's waiting room'. (44) At the turn of the millennium in the name of joining Europe the patisserie was refurbished but for the narrator it never regained its original atmosphere, which the Caffé San Marco has never lost, as it is still called Athens because 'the contract with the authorities stipulates its name' (77). In the eye of the narrator the Caffé San Marco had become the symbol of European culture while the Dornstädter of East-Central Europe. However, when he finally visited Trieste and was able to enter the Caffé in real life, he had only a couple of seconds to experience the ecstasy of the recognition that just like that had he 'imagined the Dornstädter and the Viennese coffee houses', about which he had been reading in his books (78). He was made to leave at once when the helpful Serbian waiter having recognised the narrator's "Balkan" appearance and language warned him that the place was not right for him and their fellow country people, at least not as guests (78).

During his youth for the narrator the works of Camus, Sartre, Musil, Doderer, and Joseph Roth[26] were 'the secret symbols of freedom', which 'strengthened the conviction that I still belonged to that other world, to that other culture which my readings were describing' (79). 'I also believed that this is my homeland because I am from here, I belong here, I have lost it only temporarily' (90). After having been denied the entrance into the symbol of his imaginary homeland, the narrator compares his position with Claudio Magris's, who 'on the periphery of the Mediterranean and Central-European world, in Trieste is brooding about the marvellous and imaginary Central-Europe', and 'conjures the marvellous flowers of the Central-European perish and decay', while the narrator on the border between the Balkans and Central Europe 'knows only the dried weed of this decay's flowers. The world where the naming of the streets, the cities, the identity and beliefs of the people, the borders, the systems, the leaders, the ideals, the history are changing day by day. I come from a place where every stable form has been smashed' (80-81).

[26] These writers are all considered "outsiders" in their respective literary environment.

At the same time the narrator also admits that if the Dornstädter had been preserved, with his common people origin and without socialism[27] his parents would have never had the chance to educate him and he very likely would be now a farm hand on the estate of a Hungarian or Serbian big landowner or in a better case a carter. This makes him think of 'socialism and of Tito with gratitude' (62). He recalls that during communism 'he kept dreaming culturally and politically about the West', while morally he 'wanted by all means to stay loyal to socialism' (62). This social and cultural schizophrenia is a common burden of the intelligentsia in the post-communist countries. Moreover, the narrator also confesses his fears that dreaming about Europe might have been only a pretence 'as the nearer we are getting to her, the more reluctant we are becoming. What will happen to us if our dreams become true?' (101). The narrator, however, as a restless traveller, just as Kertész's and Aldiss's characters, cannot settle for one idea but is compelled by his search for an authentic truth to move on. Therefore, he immediately suspects that the East-Central Europeans are all like the Serbian waiter, who has learned 'to mime being Central-European', to 'manipulate with European mannerisms' (102). At the same time 'we do not realise that there is nothing left for us to be mimed. There is nothing that we can dream about. Because meantime our dream has become true. But we wanted a different dream' (102).

In accordance with the subtitle of the book (Travel texts), another decisive element of the book is the travelling, the destinations and the means of which are quite diverse (a plane journey from Serbia, by train to Trieste, a bus trip to Berlin). Still what is common is that they all serve as the ground for reflection about national self-identification with the conclusion of recognising homelessness. The discordant identity of the minority intellectual is shared by the 'gastarbeiter' in Germany portrayed in the novel as it is revealed in the vivid and empathic description of the several-hour bus trip from Újvidék to Berlin on a coach that originally started off from South-Serbia. The typical motifs appear: the loud racket

[27] In the Hungarian language and public discourse the communist era is still referred to as the years of socialism signifying and simultaneously further strengthening the past and present confusion surrounding these terms. In Végel's novels it is difficult to decide whether the narrator only follows the common usage or uses the terms according their precise meanings.

in the vehicle smelling of ćevapi[28], the fear during the border crossing, which tames the rambunctious mood, then the joy over hoaxing the customs officers. The narrator contemplates the events in the bus with some intellectual superiority from a partially outsider position deriving from his Hungarian nationality and intellectual profession. But when during the journey he has to explain himself as according to one of his travel companions from South-Serbia the Hungarians only travel by plane, he justifies his presence on the guest worker bus with his status of being a Hungarian from Vojvodina and not with the real reason: his wife's fear of flying and so establish the bond among people from the periphery.

The book paints an authentic image of people who cannot anymore identify their homeland, who have exchanged their country for earning a living. Their interpretation of the Fall of the Berlin Wall renders the symbolic image of the reunification of the divided Europe problematic. Végel attempts to show the human side of the official history, just as in the case of the café, and the European bastard's perspective. One of the guest-workers from post-Yugoslavia as a street sweeper had to clean up the rubbish left behind after the celebration; the other had to cope with serving the unexpected crowd of East Germans overrunning the Aldi supermarkets. The 'Tarzan German' language, which obliterates the national conflicts among the guest workers, is also so accurately represented that it can unsettle those readers who lack some knowledge of the German language (133). The nation which have forgotten that it was natural to speak several languages in the multi-ethnic Újvidék before they 'sent them away or gun them down' now for economic reason are forced to learn German (142). While they insist on their national differences, they admit that '[a]lso, a person sometimes covets being German. Besonders, wenn Sie Sich wohl fühlen. Na ja. It would not be a bad thing to be German, but only for a short time. Only to try it out[29]' (130). Language, just as it happened intentionally in the case of Kafka and Kertész, is reterritorialised or even deterritorialised unintentionally here by the immigrant workers, who this way also aim to gain mastery over their displaced condition. Despite being an outsider,

[28] A traditional Serbian food, the Balkan variation of the Arabic kebab. It is a kind of skinless sausage made of minced meat and served on flatbread with chopped onion and spicy sauce.

[29] Only the originally Hungarian sentences have been translated into English; the German words are left untouched. The translation of the German section is 'Well, … Especially, when you feel comfortable. Certainly'.

the narrator with his personal tone and his inner doubts, questions and avoids any superior lecturing and renders his personal experience and contemplation universal.

Another motif is the conflict among the three poles of the narrator's identity: one determined by the mother tongue, the other by the citizenship and a European identity, which he is trying to combine into one single unity. As Payer pointed out, 'the spiritual conflict all the way through remains metaphysical rendering affirmative words as absolution meaningful' (Payer). As Végel explains, '[i]n East-Central Europe the greatest lie is exactly reality, you do not believe in it any more, you are not interested in it; you would hang onto what is above this, and guides you as an unexplainable force, what you call, because of anxiety, clear thought abstracted from everything. However, you know there is much more at stake. Only this anxiety can bring you the final grace, the absolution.' (Végel, 'Bűnhődés'). This is why the book's sacral-like title is valid – Atonement. The narrator's childhood love, a Serbian woman, when they meet in Berlin, explains to him that her German husband's reaction to the Fall of the Berlin Wall was 'Wir haben gesühnen' and when she asked him to explain to her the meaning of his words he refused it saying that 'Sühne, gesühnen … you will never understand it' (Végel, *Bünhődés* 148). Later the narrator, being unfamiliar with this expression, has to search the dictionary to reveal the 'German secret. And also mine. And also ours. It means atonement. That is all' (149). Here Végel resonates with Kertész, who finds the German model of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' exemplary in order to enable the individual just as the community to investigate the negative aspects of their past, come to terms with it so that they can fully live their present. The German cultural movement may be best translated in the East-Central European area as 'the past elaboration' since this expression includes the relentless pursuit of understanding and also the public debate necessary for this process. However, the 'come to terms with the past' translation might evoke more Végel's 'atonement' and 'search for absolution' as it implies the possibility of release, forgiveness and a better future.

The final essay '**What is Yugoslavia**?'[30] is whirling around the narrator's agony when in a Bell language school, presumably in England, he is asked by the English native teacher to give a presentation about this topic to his classmates from all over the world. As the story takes place in the very midst of the break up of the country and the Yugoslav Wars, the narrator has come to the school exactly 'to be able to forget the whole if only for a couple of weeks' (153). He, however, can only respond to his teacher, due to the servile attitude ingrained in him by his personal past and education and by the history of his homeland and because of the inferior feelings caused merely by the different statuses of their respective nationalities, with '**yes, my homework, this weekend I'll write my homework, yes, Yugoslavia, yes**' and is forced to face his inability to answer the question even for himself, let alone, to explain it for uninterested outsiders. Compared to the previous two parts' tone of resignation, here the narrator's frustration and anger is more openly expressed, which is also apparent in the punctuation with no sentences but thought fragments divided by commas, which makes the whole text a never-resting flow of thoughts broken up by empty spaces signifying the dead ends of the narrator's attempts.

The text is occasionally split by English words ceaselessly indicating that the narrator has lost his linguistic footing and is attempting to identify himself, his past, his minority position to the other side of Europe. '**The teacher**' becomes the symbol of the world 'which has had enough of the Balkan massacre and the Central-European **vakuum storys**, which is not only an outrageous but also a boring thing, much more important is …. **Times weather report**' (168). The part is about the failure of comprehension and self-comprehension. The English language functions not in its linguistic existence but in the sense of content and ideology compared to the Hungarian and Serbian languages. The narrator realises that the spirit of the English language 'forces a different kind of thinking' on him and 'has a completely different story in store' for him' (156). When he pronounces that '**I am from Yugoslavia , but I am not a Serb'** means 'a third kind of something, a

[30] I marked with boldface the words which were put already in English in the original Hungarian text. I left the German and Serbian words as they appeared in the original text. I also preserved the occasional spelling, grammar and stylistic errors, which Végel deliberately uses to express the narrator's position as a foreign speaker and his uncomfortable situation as a multi-lingual writer expressing himself in a language he has no mastery of.

postmodern centaur, and this centaur existence forces every further word out of its position, creates the disorder of linguistic identity' (160). It not only means that a person in the minority language position cannot be cast in the box of either a horse or a human as 'in one box a familiar stranger, in the other a strange acquaintance', but also that 'the centaurs remind of Europe's bad conscience, this is why they are not given a place anywhere, only in Greek mythology.'

Just as in the *Bűnhődés*'s diary novel genre, Végel in his following book *Neoplanta, avagy az Ígéret Földje*, (Neoplanta, or the Promised Land) which is named on the cover as "a town novel", fuses the personal (diary, town) with the novel, and also the reality with the fiction. The mixture carries all the way through the two modes of reading, blurs the line between facts and imagination, and creates the atmosphere of open possibilities and of different interpretations. This philosophy of the uncertainty, unreliability of reality creates the perfect form for the novel which describes the history of a town which was 'liberated' in 1918, 41, 44, 89-99 and 99, etc, and the history of which was rewritten by each liberator, and where the streets were renamed by each new authority (Kocsis). As the narrator in *Bűnhődés* observed about the town, Újvidék, which also has many names[31], '[j]ust as the street names were changing, so too were transubstantiating the people's view, philosophy, ideal and values. The human fate moulders, fragments, finally, it cannot even be called a fate' (Végel, *Bűnhődés*, 82).

The title of the book refers to the legend of Újvidék's foundation that 'in 1748 the Germans, Serbs, Hungarians, Jews, Armenians and all the other ethnicities living here joined together […] to buy the title of a free royal city from the Empress Maria Theresa', who wrote on the founding document 'Let its name be Neoplanta and all nations shall call it in their own languages. They shall live in peace, love each other, and this multi-ethnic city shall be the example of the peaceful inhabitation of different nations' (Végel, *Neoplanta*, Back cover). The title, the genre specification and the accuracy of the historical events portrayed suggest a traditional factual authenticity but the book starts with the warning that 'Any possible similarity with the real events is coincidence' (5). This warning foreshadows the bitter irony pervading the story which takes place during the

[31] Újvidék (in German Neusatz, in Serbian Novi Sad)

military take over of the Serbs, then of the Hungarians, the Vojvodina Raid in 1942, then the Communist Purges in 1944-45, the Yugoslavian era and the first days after the breakup of Yugoslavia. At the same time this book just like *Bűnhődés* has many autobiographical elements and through the twentieth-century history of the city the reader also gets an insight into the adolescence of the narrator.

The book about Neoplanta, where more than 250 years have passed since its utopian foundation and the peoples 'have been ceaselessly killing each other ever since', as Végel commented, 'replays the tragedy of a town', it is a new and partly fictional version of the same old pattern, as here 'everyone arrived as if they had been on their way to the Promised Land, and so they arrived as conquerors, therefore, no wonder that it is bordered by mass graves. And nobody is brave enough to face their own crimes. They change the street names, the names of the people and squares, everything always starts again' (Végel, in Vári). Végel eases the despondency with humour and irony but his irony is a response to the disappointment. Disappointment in any liberator, the socialism under Tito but also in the subsequent democracy. In addition to the political disillusionment Végel also experiences the lost illusion of the homeland, while he has always remained true to his "stateless local-patriotism". As he explained, 'I have always dreamt about the big wide world but at the most difficult times, during the Balkan War or the air raids I did not leave Vojvodina even once' (Végel, in Vári). He is often titled 'liberal cosmopolitan' by nationalists and while he partially embraces this category he adds that he is not a world citizen in the sense that he stays in his homeland and his works 'are not about the abstract, general world but about Vojvodina, the fate of the people living there and the cultural diversity and tragedy of Újvidék' (Végel, in Vári).

The story of the town is told by the narrator and through him by his conversational partners, most importantly Lazo Pavletić, the fiacre driver. The time of the narration is 1992 the year when Lazo dies on his vehicle and the secret of the disappearance of his Second World War fellow soldiers is finally solved, as it is revealed that the Serbian Lazo was forced to take part in the Hungarian and German men's ethnic murder after the War in the name of victory. Lazo, who has been telling his life story to his customers for half a century, was carrying the burden of this secret until his death. 'This is the cowardice of the victorious' and

Végel feels that Lazo fate symbolises 'the 20th-century disease' of people living here: 'they are not brave enough to face their past, their sins, their reality' (Végel, 'Se'). Although it is not referred to in the text, but the reader knows that the time of the narration is when the Yugoslavian War started. Lazo, who for decades is taking the narrator for rides through the city, shares with him the story of his father, who during the First World War left Croatia as the soldier of the Monarchy but arrived in Újvidék as a Serbian liberator. His mother worked in the Dornstädter patisserie and through her story the changes in the owners and guests of the café house can be followed giving it an indirect female perspective. The Hungarian narrator recalls his secondary school years and so introduces another (minority and generational) perspective on the events.

For Végel the opposition of minority and majority, of oppressors and the oppressed is, although bitter reality, still only an illusion. While the characters generally treat minority identity as an unambiguous notion, its illusionary nature is portrayed in the usage of the Jewish identity. When Lazo's Serbian father, originally from Croatia, in his deathbed would like to find out his wife's true national identity, which she despite her true attempts cannot narrow down to one single identity, he finally asks her 'Are you not rather a Jew? It is the easiest for them, they do not belong either here or there… I have realised that everyone in their life has been a Jew or will be…. The Hungarians too, the Serbs too, the Germans too, the people from Neoplanta too, he implied with a secretive face. Then, as if having been frightened by what he had said, he started to suffocate' (Végel, *Neoplanta* 161-162). This motif returns several times in the book when Lazo is thinking about a Serbian soldier's possible fate during the Second World War who scolded him for being merely a degenerate Serbian because of coming from Vojvodina, he contemplates, 'it is possible he finished between the two frontlines, maybe the Russians, maybe the Hungarians liquidated him. Perhaps he was aimed at from both sides and the hail of bullets riddled him. Before his death, for a moment, he also was a Jew' (162). Or as the older Lazo complains, 'I would have liked to find at least one friend in this rotten city where everyone experiences being a Jew once, only they are not brave enough to admit it' (165). Adam's conclusion in Kertész's *Liquidation* echoes in Lazo's feelings.

Imre Cserhalmi noted that '[a]nyone who knows and understands Vojvodina, receives a valid historical perspective, recipe, instruction manual for the whole of East-Central Europe' (Cserhalmi). Standing on the middle of a Danube bridge the narrator describes Újvidék's position that it keeps pulling from two directions: from the south 'some kind of nonchalance, the desire for conquest, the naïve art of joyous expropriation, which, when appears, the landscape freezes', and from the north 'a sly, refined hypocrisy' (Végel, *Neoplanta* 236). Due to the town's geographical location the narrator further complicates the traditional West and East divide projecting the North-South opposition over it. This complex geographical, political and cultural position, as the narrator concludes, is the reason why 'we are toddling in one place in our own city. We do not know why, we do not know for how long. The numb crowd can hardly wait for being invaded because they do not know how to live, they know only how to dream. It is dreaming about the new Barbarians to whom they can surrender themselves' (236). While the river Danube, which is most commonly portrayed as the symbolic connection of the East-Central European lands, 'does not at all look like the European tale' (237). Here she is revealed to have been for centuries a 'dark, sombre, large mass grave', on the banks of which, 'people have been killing each other with holy passion, but this fact has been kept wisely in silence' (237). When talking about Europe the narrator unexpectedly starts to use English words in his speech, referring presumably to the language used by the European authorities[32].'The Danube connects us, they recite the banal story in the European saloons, **yes, yes**, I answer, and observe with alarm how the storytellers keep raising their champagne glasses. Alas, if only they were not celebrating, were not celebrating the mysterious mass graves, the Danubian lies' (237).[33] The narrator scolds himself for having obediently kept repeating the lies when he should have loudly corrected them saying '**Yes, massgrave**. To articulate it, to face the power of the words. **Large mass grave in the Danube**. Massangrabe. Viele große Massengraben in der Donau, die

[32] I marked with boldface the words which had been put already in English in the originally Hungarian text. I left the German and Serbian words as they had appeared in the original text.

[33] The scene invoked by Végel echoes the banquet episode starting Aldiss's *Somewhere East of Life*, when the World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage representatives from Western Europe celebrate in Budapest before they go off to their assignments to the East. As from the narrator's rhetoric the same frustration is oozing out as in the Georgian priest's complaints about the real concern of the European Union towards the sufferings of the people.

Deutschen, **serbs**, Hungarians, Jews, **yes, Jews**, Juden, Jevreji, ja, ja, we live together with the mass graves' (337). Therefore, practically 'all of us are the grandchildren or at least the heirs of murderers. We, however, ease our minds that the murderer is always the other and all we participated in the starting of the massacre was that we fired back' (237).

The acidic ridicule is not only directed towards the narrator's fellow country people but also towards the visitors from the West. Towards the tourists who keep repeating '**wonderful city, wonderful city**', '**And multicultural**' but would not understand anything if the narrator stated 'Ja, ja, multiculturalische Massengrabe' (238). Towards 'the extremely determined, adventurous Western lefties' who after having visited the area with state retinue observe 'arguing with the fake Western democracy how original the Balkans' elemental force is' but 'hurry back to the silky Western decadence' that they condemned to death (239). Towards the Western gentleman who has found himself in the area by sheer accident and who rushes onward in order to report to an international charity organisation that the locals 'occasionally are shooting' but 'the best is to let them do it' as it is their 'ancient instinct, lifestyle'. 'Even if this folklore ends in a tragedy'(240). The final conclusion of his report is: 'Let's help this little exotic world, whose inhabitants are just as ridiculous as dangerous' (240). And the narrator finally directs his disappointment and abhorrence towards himself who considers his homeland as 'a goddamn area, an immensely unhappy outlook', 'a point which is looking out onto the four corners of Europe but is lost in the mist' (240). The narrator's description of the European saloons', the Western-European perspective on the area brings to mind Aldiss's heroes travelling the Eastern side and the gatherings of the European elites presented in his books.

The same way as in *Bűnhődés*, which finishes with the narrator's inability to explain himself, here also the inadequacy of the language to cover reality is emphasized when the daughter of a school friend is trying to give a true account of her father's life to the narrator. She 'pronounced the words more and more slowly as if she was not completely sure in what she wanted to say. I understood her. I feel exactly like her. The sentences are shorter and shorter, there are fewer and fewer words, and finally those left are not worth anything' (250). After Lazo's death, the fiacre is taken away by a middle-aged man appearing out of nowhere and with

whom the narrator cannot communicate as he is talking in a 'mixed language' (290). The narrator tries unsuccessfully German, Serb, Hungarian, French and English to make himself understood, but the response is always the same gibberish, the words of which the narrator can more or less recognise from different languages, but the sentences still do not make sense (290). While the man is dragging away the fiacre, the narrator is looking after him using Lazo's favourite expression 'Jebi se![34]' and thinking that 'this figure is crackbrained, apparently he imagines being a hero, who will liberate us some fine day' (292).

And so he does in Végel's next book, entitled *Balkáni szépség avagy Slemil fattyúja* (Balkan Beauty or the Bastard of Slemil) as Slemil, the narrator-protagonist, was the one who pulled home Lazo's fiacre, met the narrator of *Neoplanta* and tried to communicate with him with the last words of Grandfather Slemil. At the end of his story Slemil not only manages to find someone to tell the previous generations' stories but by burning down his family home he also escapes their cursed fate. He also liberates himself from the destiny bestowed to him through his name. In Adalbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls Wundersame Geschichte* (Peter Schlemihl's Wonderful Story) Schlemihl sells his shadow but never his soul to the Devil for a bottomless wallet but all he gains is society's rejection. In Újvidék Schlemihl's story is turned upside down as Slemil, just as his grandfather Slemil, has not one shadow but too many since as many names they are called by and as many identities they assume, as many haunting shadows they carry which they cannot escape from in the same way as Schlemihl cannot get rid of the burden of having no shadow at all. The grandfather born at the end of the eighteenth-century is christened as Slemil János, but his official name changes from Johann Schlemihl to Jovan Slemil according to the political power shifts, and continuing the family tradition Slemil born after the Second World War is called by his mother, who wants to raise him as German, Franz Schlemihl, by his Hungarian grandfather Slemil Ferenc and by the current authorities Franjo Slemil. Even when he is only a child his grandfather warns him 'our name haunts us as a shadow, it sticks to us, and we can never get rid of it. It hounds us independently whether we want it or not. It seems you are going to have three names, which means you will

[34] In Serbian 'Fuck you!'. The usage of rude expressions by the characters signifies not their lack of education but the helpless frustration of the impossibility to comprehend and control their fates.

have to live with three shadows' (Végel, *Balkáni* 179). As Végel recalls his conversation with Danilo Kiš[35] about identity, he concludes that identity does not only depend on what somebody perceives themselves but also on what the world think of them. Kiš 'initially did not consider himself as Jewish but he was made one as he had been kept being called one' (Végel, 'Balkán').

The other destiny carried in Slemil's name is derived from the Yiddish usage of the word slemil, which means unlucky fellow, a helpless fumbler. The motif of naming in the novels raises the issue how much individual fate is determined by the geographical location, the ethnic and social status at birth or by the wheel of fortune in life and how much it is influenced by the political agencies. A resonating dilemma was raised by Professor Embry in Aldiss's *Remembrance Day*. Although both men, grandfather and grandson, are jack-of-all-trades and earn their living by repairing everything needed, they still cannot accommodate smoothly enough to the world in continuous change around them. Not only are they ordered time and time again to make the different coats of arms for the political powers coming and going, but their past, their life story and their fates are also always expropriated and rewritten. Grandfather Slemil's 'mysterious ailment', his stammer starts when he tries to explain to his grandson the meaning of the world homeland and the reason why he stayed and never escaped (Végel, *Balkáni* 38). The grandfather after having survived the ceaseless reterritorialisation of the words and the realisation that he cannot escape from this repetition, just as Kafka's characters, in Deleuze and Guattari's phrasing, in his last, incomprehensible sentence before his death achieves 'a way out', the act of the deterritorialisation of the language. As a result of all the shameful compromises he has made for the family's survival, Grandfather Slemil first starts stammering and finally loses his voice altogether and at the physical level with the loss of the will to act as a final defiance he decides to spend his life in a wheelchair.

The grandson learns from his grandfather's example and the book is the narrated written form of Slemil's obsessive insistence on telling the story of his grandfather driven by the desire to avoid his grandfather's fate and by the fear of death as his grandfather died when he 'escaped into silence' (10). Slemil gets into

[35] Danilo Kiš's father was a Jewish Hungarian and his mother Montenegrin. The writer was born in Vojvodina and christened as Kiss Dániel. He wrote in Serbo-Croatian.

conversation with everyone, as he says ‘I am ceaselessly pouring the words out’ as ‘[i]t happens that the words do not come to my mind, it gets blocked, then feeling ashamed I stutter. I am struggling in vain, the more I would like it, the tenser I am becoming. Therefore, I never shut my mouth’ (10). He is stammering on but he cannot find anyone who would listen. He addresses his monologue to his customers, to the waiters and guests of the restaurant in the neighbouring hotel and to the women who enter his life. However, most of all to the reader who is often the only one left to listen after the characters in the book have escaped and is continuously drawn into the text with its spoken, casual and intimate tone resembling an endless conversation (Végel, Balkán). With Slemil’s obsessive stammering-on Végel invokes the narrator’s frustrated struggles in *Bünhődés*, the inescapable urge to document despite the apparent lack of a comprehending audience. This motif is so familiar from Kertész’s philosophy about the moral obligation of testimony.

In the world presented through the two Slemils’ lives not only identity is precarious but existence as well since everything is in continuous motion. As Végel explained, ‘there are no partial changes here, the life falls into some kind of radicalism’ (Végel, Balkán). In this political and social environment where there has been no peaceful transition of power the literary and cultural time and space have become problematic as well. Végel contemplating about the time and place of narration laments that in this part of Europe ‘time is always broken’, fragmented around and inside people, there is no continuous flow, which would make the world around perceptible and comprehensible. This lack also unsettles the narrative place resulting in a reciprocal destructive process. ‘Always has everything to be started from the beginning. No narrative can be built on another, one tone refutes the other. The past has no evidence [in the present]’ (Végel, ‘Peremregény’).

In this world with ever-changing power structures, ethnic make-up, customs and values everyone is searching for a survival strategy, mainly unsuccessfully. In the title the definition ‘the Bastard of Slemil’ not only indicates the uncertainty surrounding the identity of Slemil’s father but also refers back to the expression ‘the European bastard’ indicating the East-Central European fate in relation to the Western part in *Bűnhődés*. As Végel describes it in his essay ‘Periphery novel, bastard novel’ the East-Central European, especially the minority, individual is a

bastard as their ‘existence is determined by the periphery and not the centre’ (Végel, ‘Peremregény’).

In the novel in the symbolic representation of the search for a survival strategy there is, as it appears already in the title, an antithesis to the common-people existence the Slemils are forced to live: the figure of the Balkan Beauty. In the course of the story and therefore the history of the area there are three main female characters who take on the symbolic role, showing an attraction, a meaning beyond the every day people’s mundane struggles for survival. While they are carefully presented, lifelike characters distinctively different from each other, they can also be seen as the alternatives of a female destiny in the Balkans. They do not settle for the lives predetermined by their positions but are able to take their fortune in their own hands and direct their fate. The first one, Ivana, the most typical is a woman from Belgrade, who after having gone through all the pouches of the ‘Balkan whorehouse’ desires only for becoming an artist’s model in Vienna (Végel, ‘Balkáni’). She achieves it and in the paintings of a famous female painter she is transformed into the true Balkan Beauty and the symbol of longing for far away. The second representative, Svetlana, is admired for her cold cruelty as a partisan and later as a communist officer, whose bloodthirsty determination to take revenge for her Jewish fiancé’s murder during the Second World War makes her interesting and miraculous. The youngest, the post-communist generation’s Balkan Beauty, Laura incorporates her peers’ disillusionment and unscrupulous self-assertion and is the model of self-interest and escapism. She, similarly to her predecessors, is using her physical attraction to lure the men into assisting her in achieving her goals.

While the portrayal of these women can be interpreted as an underlying female or even feminist counter-narrative, it is highly dubious as they are cast by the male history into a symbolic and so unreal position. The main phallogocentric ideals are personified and so objectified in the bodies of these women therefore they are not suited for the representations of any feminine values. The three symbolic woman figures beyond the reach of the men desiring them aspire the male characters for a different life, while the other every day women who are sharing the men’s fates and lives and who could give an authentic voice to a female counter-narrative do not seem to be carry real significance. The three

Balkan Beauties are regularly mistaken for each other and they all share the principia of the Balkan Beauty, which are alluring sensuality, cruelty and rootlessness. They are not bound by home attachment or any moral principles as many of the men are burdened but can follow their hearts' desires and use their attraction to achieve it. They are the embodiment of the destructive forces of the patriarchal society: Ivana is connected to the First, Svetlana the Second World War, while Laura to the Yugoslav war. Ivana is driven by lofty ideals, Svetlana by cold cruelty supported by ideologies and Laura is the combination of a trickster businesswoman and a high-class prostitute. The portrayal of these stereotypes of Eastern-European women is discussed in detail from a British perspective in relation to Marina Lewycka's novels.

The character who could tell the female side of the events is strangely silent and mostly absent from the novel. Erika, Grandfather Slemil's daughter, who is also Slemil's mother, not only shares the Slemils' name but fate as well. She is not only deprived of a narrative voice but also of a personal story. Grandfather Slemil justifies his servile attitude towards every new authority with his obsession of securing the prestigious position of the post office girl for his daughter, who despises both his father's self-abasement and the job. It is implied that Grandfather Slemil more than once escapes being prosecuted by the different regimes only because Erika has used her body to buy his release. These mutually unwanted sacrifices are never discussed and only a growing resentment can be felt in the family.

Végel described his book as an anti-saga novel as, firstly, the novel depicts the lives of menials, servants, and farm hands with fragmented, disintegrating family stories. (Végel, 'Balkáni') Secondly, because of the cruel turns of the twentieth century the identity of Slemil's father is never clarified. Thirdly, as Végel explains 'the novel makes the reader face that there is no direction to follow [in life and in history] and no real family' (Végel, 'Balkáni'). He poses the question what has been left if the possibility of narration is abandoned, the belief that there were points of departure from where the great-grandfathers started off and there are and going to be directions towards which the grandchildren are heading has been given up (Végel, 'Balkáni').

Slemil, when relentlessly insisting on narrating his family's story, cannot abandon the possibility of turning the events into a meaningful destiny. He can find redemption only in the listening of a woman, who is the daughter of Svetlana and a disillusioned painter who was in love with Ivana. She does not posses her mother's sensuality and power but as the child of her parents' unhappy marriage she is able to become the right audience for Slemil. Telling the story is not only significant as through the narration he can face the shadows of past events, compromises and crimes witnessed or assisted but also it is the only alternative left for survival and escape from the fate of the grandfather. By telling the story he also attempts to personalise the story of his family which is constantly appropriated, reinterpreted and rewritten by others. At the same time by burning down the family home he finally rebels again and breaks off from following the predestined behaviour patterns of the previous generations.

His solution is not glorious, it is even hard to sympathise with it, but represents 'a means of survival' showing the faith of someone who despite everything has not escaped but decided to stay (Végel, 'Balkáni'). Végel still living in Vojvodina also experiences day by day that 'the space around is becoming devoid' as people are emigrating in great numbers (Végel, 'Balkáni'). Végel's work has been translated into Serbian and some of his books into German but none into English so it is not available for a broader public. The writer represents the home community that people are leaving behind, the perspective of the European bastard in stark contrast with Marina Lewycka's Western European portrayal of the Eastern-European immigration to Britain.

Chapter 5

A Woman Bestseller on the Migration in Europe

Marina Lewycka published *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*[36] in 2005 and Rose Tremain's novel *The Road Home*[37] came out in 2008, both exploring Eastern European immigration into the UK. Lewycka commented on this similarity as 'I do think there's a Zeitgeist – ideas and themes which are current, and which grab everyone's imagination' (Lewycka, in The View). The question of immigration, the relationship among the different parts of Europe, the essential requirements of Europeanness, the cultural and social composition of Europe have been the major issues of recent political events. Although the current migrant crisis has shifted the focus away from internal European economic migration, it has strong connections with the present situation. This topic is at the centre in all of Lewycka's books, which, as I am going to argue, combine the form of comic novels with popular romance and "chicklit". These books offer not only social commentary on contemporary conditions but the possible explanations for their outstanding popularity might highlight more subtle but prevailing British attitudes and feelings towards immigration and the other side of Europe. As Domnica Radulescu and Valentina Glajar pointed out, in Western consciousness and imagination the East Europeans 'represent the ultimate expression of liminality, as they are not drastically Other and thus are endowed with an aura of the familiar, or Europeaness, and yet they are not fully familiar, or European, either, as they come from the most remote regions of Europe, perceived as *almos*t Oriental, as *almost* exotic, yet not fully so' (Radulescu and Glajar 4). This way through examining the

[36] *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* is narrated by the middle-aged Nadezhda, whose Ukrainian parents immigrated to Britain after the Second World War. She and her sister, Vera, are forced to give up their sibling rivalry when their recently-widowed father decides to marry a divorced woman from Ukraine half his age. While the sisters leave no stone unturned in order to deport the new-comer and she uses every means to get British citizenship for herself and her teenager son, the old man is writing the history of tractors in Ukrainian.

[37] *The Road Home* tells the story of the forty-two-year-old Lev coming from an imaginary Eastern-European country to Britain to find employment in order to be able to support his young daughter, who is taken care of by his mother back at home. He is still mourning for his deceased wife and trying to come to terms with the loss.

literary representations of the figure of the Eastern-European immigrant, the Western-European concept of Europeaness is equally explored.

Lewycka in all of her four novels addresses serious contemporary themes and as O'Keeffe, not without irony, pointed out she 'has become progressively more ambitious in her scope, beginning with a family saga (*Tractor*) and then, with *Two Caravans*[38], taking the implicitly political decision to tell the stories of migrant labourers. *We Are All Made of Glue*[39] follows the trajectory, encompassing a profusion of "issues", from the miners' strike to the English class system and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' (O'Keeffe). Lewycka's fourth novel, *Various Pets Alive and Dead*[40] makes no bones about engaging with another urgent political issue, the corruption of money markets. All these topics seem, however, to present one fundamental widely-shared concern about the possible loss of long-treasured values, as she demonstrated in her article reflecting on David Cameron's speech in 2013 about his plans for the referendum on the British membership in the European Union, referring to Britain's unchangeable character of an island nation. According to Lewycka, Cameron's oratory might be 'luring us to tear apart the social and employment protections and rights which European workers have accumulated over the past half-century […] Decent pay, rights at work, shorter working hours, good public services, dignity in retirement, environmental protection – a Europe based on democracy, free trade, and committed to the shared prosperity of all its citizens' (Lewycka, 'I'). She warned that he could assist 'to smash up the dream of European social democracy' and lay 'all its citizens bare to the predatory forces of the global markets' (Lewycka, 'I').

While all these topics might sound overambitious, Lewycka has an admirable belief and mission to tackle and solve with fiction the most urgent issues of the

[38] *Two Caravans* was published in 2007. It tells the story of two Ukrainians, three Polish people, two Chinese and a Malawian, who originally work together as strawberry pickers at a farm in Kent and live in two caravans placed on the field.

[39] Brought out in 2009 the novel is narrated by Georgie Sinclair, who has just recently been separated from her husband. Her loneliness and midlife crisis is positively disturbed by her forming friendship with Naomi Shapiro, an elderly Jewish lady. In her quest to help Naomi to be able to stay at home despite her fragile health a Palestinian family become Georgie's greatest allies.

[40] *Various Pets Alive and Dead* came out in 2012 and depicts the relationships in an ex-commune family. The story is set in 2008 and describes the life of Doro and Marcus and their three children, Clara, a school teacher in a deprived area, Serge, a Cambridge student of mathematics working as a quantitative analyst for an investment firm and Oolie Anna, who has Downs Syndrome and whose greatest wish is to start her independent life. Through Serge's occupation in the City and his love for her Ukrainian colleague, Maroushka the background of the economic crisis is explored.

present. Her literary ambitions are most apparent in her comments about *Glue*, which focuses on 'the dispute between Palestine and Israel' (Lewycka, in The View). She identifies the reason for writing, as 'I was so troubled about the state of the world, I wanted to learn for myself what was happening over there – it seems to be one of the central problems of our time. I was trying to understand the current situation in the Middle East and find out whether there is a solution to the problems' (Lewycka, in The View). Lewycka, however, is making the conflict not only a world affair but a European issue as well since she most importantly wants to find the answer for whether this conflict is 'in some indirect way an effect of the holocaust' and she sets the book in an English suburb with characters immigrated from the troubled areas to Britain. She is not so much interested in the historical and social complexity since as a novelist she considers 'what has happened in people's hearts. How is this possible, this lack of human feeling? How has it so completely broken down?' ('Peak'). Lewycka feels that the atrocities might be caused by a failure of imagination since 'to be able to imagine what it is like to be another human being is a huge step forward that some people are unable to make' ('Peak'). With her novels she aims at inviting people 'to make those imaginary steps, to see the world through another person's eyes. They might do this with a book but not yet be able to do so in real life. Then maybe next time they will meet someone in everyday life, and they can also take that step of imagination' ('Peak'). Her aspiration might be paralleled with Kertész's and Végel's intentions; however, the realisation is completely different. Her much acclaimed technique is to combine personal and global by carefully observing characters and their life situations but at the same time giving them a global dimension through their personal histories. In this way Lewycka tries to tackle the difficulty raised by Nadia in *Tractor* when her father talks about the more than twenty million Soviet citizens who perished in the war, 'the number is so vast it is unknowable. In that measureless ocean of tears and blood, where are the landmarks, the familiar bearings?' (Lewycka, *A Short* 310)'.

Lewycka's extraordinary belief in literature's power of influencing reality is perceptible in her sincere worries about her novel *We Are All* when she tells Raja Shedaheh, a Palestinian writer, that 'I haven't been able to come to any wider conclusions or to say this is the right way forward to resolve the conflict in the

Middle East. All I have done is given the characters voices, and I am sorry to say that, because of the sort of writer I am, they are comic voices, so maybe people will be offended even by that' ('Peak'). Shedaheh, however, reassures her that '[a]ll the better to have comic voices, a little bit of comic relief is needed in that situation. And the best way for people sometimes to understand the situation is to laugh about it' ('Peak'). Végel is often complemented on his refined sense of humour carefully balancing between irony and sarcasm and Kertész's prose is flavoured with subtle sarcasm while both writers manage to escape oversimplification and misrepresentations, which Lewycka could not always avoid.

It was humour that brought publication and success for Lewycka at the age of 58 as she described the background of *A Short History*, 'I used to take myself a bit seriously. I had this idea that writers had to be earnest. When I allowed myself to be funny it all took off' (Lewycka, in Llewellyn Smith). Her skills at combining seriousness and comedy, according to Lewycka, come from her background, since 'black comedy is very Eastern European. You celebrate whatever there is to celebrate, because you never know whether there's going to be anything to celebrate tomorrow.' (Lewycka, in Llewellyn Smith) In Llewellyn Smith' opinion, 'tapping into that ancestral humour was what transformed Lewycka from a wannabe author with two unpublished novels in a drawer to the phenomenon she is today' (Llewellyn Smith). This phenomenon is heavily based and marketed on Lewycka's personal background, which made her somehow in the media the authentic voice, an authority on immigration ideas. As Susan Tranter pointed out 'Marina Lewycka's own background has given her a special position as a writer of imaginative fiction. Born to Ukrainian parents in a refugee camp in Kiel, but raised by them in the UK, she is able to observe Britain both as an insider and an outsider' (Tranter). Tranter attributes to Lewycka 'an impressive ability to negotiate this dual perspective, and in the process, to capture something relevant and necessary about contemporary Britain and its mix of cultures' (Tranter). This marketing strategy of highlighting together the novelist's exotic appeal with her Britishness is transparent in her first novel's cover design. As Lewycka explained, the only brief given to the designer John Gray 'was that because the title was rather 'male' the cover should have feminine appeal' (Lewycka, in The View). He

used the style of Ostalgia[41] as 'he gave the books a rather utilitarian look, to make them seem like authentic books from the former Soviet Union' with a deliberate 'off-the-straight' appeal (Lewycka, in The View).[42] As Doris Lechner summarises, the marketing strategy was 'clearly built on the image of Eastern Europe's perception as one of backwardness' (Lechner 446).

Lewycka's educational and enlightening standpoint is revealed when being asked about *Caravans* she admits that it really takes 'a look at some of the darker aspects of life in Britain today, but is told with a humour, so people don't immediately put it down. Some of the characters do get lost to prostitution; there are gang masters, slavery, and exploitation. But my aim is not so much to raise social and political issues as to give readers an opportunity to see the world through someone else's eyes' (Lewycka, in The View). In the same way as Lewycka dares all the difficult topics from intimate to tragic she does not shy away either from every level of humour ranging from subtle irony, sarcasm to farce or even grotesque. With one of Lewycka's characteristic authorial jokes reflecting on the affairs of writing Nadia says midway through *Tractor* that she "had thought this story was going to be a knockabout farce, but now I see it is developing into a knockabout tragedy' (Lewycka, *A Short* 213). While many appraised Lewycka's first two books about the ability to present painful issues, as Jane Shilling put it, 'from a comic perspective, keeping a fine balance between anguish and fou rire', many reviewers found that in the following books when the topics are becoming more intractable, 'the balance is less assured, the tone uncertain' (Shilling). Lewycka seems to focus on the validity of comedy dealing with tragic events and her technique to work with historically sensitive issues is to separate them from the humorous sections in her books. About *We Are All* she states that 'I had to be careful to put the comic voice aside when I was writing about the serious things as that would have been offensive' (Lewycka in Pellegrino). She compares the structure of her novel, in which comic and tragic episodes alternate, to her protagonist, Georgie's sensation while sitting on a bus driving down an avenue of trees. 'As we thundered along among the treetops, I closed my eyes and felt

[41] The term, originally deriving from the German word 'ostalgie', refers to the feeling of nostalgia for the former life in the ex-communist countries.

[42] It is interesting that for the American and Canadian cover they needed 'something prettier' since as Lewycka pointed out those readers could not relate to the style of Ostalgia.

through my eyelids the brilliant spring light flicker over my face: dark-light-dark-light-dark-light' (Lewycka, *We* 581). Lewycka describes the result of her technique as 'it is not that you are laughing out loud about the Holocaust […] you are laughing to the silly situations the narrator gets herself into while learning about these other things in the background' (Lewycka, in Barranger). The greatest concern, however, is whether it is possible to set apart comic and serious and to find the fine line, the fragile balance between comedy and mockery, earnestness and popularism, profound and banal. Can Lewycka's audience interpret her nuanced satire of stereotypes and authorial self-irony or taking the stories at face value do their preconceptions only get confirmed?

When asked about *A Short History of Tractors*' success, Lewycka attributed its outstanding popularity to the fact that 'the book was very different to anything that was on the market at the time […]. The main difference is that it was funny, and […] there was a sort of directness about it that appealed to people' (Lewycka, in Porter). In the novel all main characters are immigrants: Nikolai and his family from post WWII Eastern Europe and Valentina from post-communist Ukraine. The novel investigates the relationship between the already British citizens of Eastern-European origin and the newcomers fighting for the right to stay. At the same time in connection with the two sisters' relationship and the retelling of the family stories the book is deeply engaged, as it is read on Lewycka's official website, with 'the legacy of Europe's history over the last fifty years' (Lewycka website).

The story, although narrated by Nadezhda/Nadia, is revolving around the 'glamorous blonde Ukrainian divorcée' called Valentina, with whom Nadezhda's father Nikolai falls in love (Lewycka, *A Short* 1). Although all the characters are, to different degrees and in various ways, inextricably drawn to her, Valentina, as Andrew Lawless noted, is presented as 'a cruel, gold-digging dominatrix' with little humanity and 'contrary to formula, Lewycka doesn't really try to give us greater insight into her motives' (Lawless). Valentina is observed only through the eyes of Nadia, who inwardly using such emotionally charged phrases to describe Valentina as 'this painted Russian tart' and 'cheap slut' (Lewycka, *A Short* 78, 113). Furthermore, Valentina's actions, among them her violence against the elderly and fragile Nikolai, her greed and shopping crazes, make it very difficult for the reader to sympathise with her. When asked about Valentina's character in terms of being

politically correct Lewycka admitted that 'I did worry about this a lot, but I wanted to be truthful. And the truth is that immigrants are like any other people – some are awful, and some are heroes, and most are somewhere in between' (Lewycka, in Lawless).

Despite Lewycka's insistence on Valentina's realness, her main female immigrant character seems to play on what Dominica Radulescu identifies as racist and sexist essentialism. Radulescu and Glajar observed that concerning the ways 'East European women have been perceived by the Western mind' this essentialism, which consists of 'wretchedness, naturalness, exoticism, and manliness/vampirism, reflects an ambiguous attitude of both fear and fascination, repulsion and attraction, toward this familiar Other' (Radulescu and Glajar 7). On the one hand, Valentina is depicted as an over-sexualised, culturally inferior Other, a mere sexual object. Valentina's physical description includes references to 'her handsome barbarous profile', 'a wanton expanse of dimpled, creamy flesh', and she is hardly mentioned without allusions to her 'superior', 'voluptuous' breasts (Lewycka, *A Short* 261, 1). The money she manages to coax from Nikolai she spends on breast enlargement surgery and her income, earned with hard illegal work in a nursing home and a hotel, on gaudy clothes and garish underwear. On the other hand, Valentina possesses an exotic charm, an irresistible sex appeal to all, including the male and female, characters, and she is the one around whom all the characters seem to whirl and who has no scruples about alluring the characters, taking advantage of them and, when they have finally no use for her, about abandoning them. She has no accommodation of her own so she moves (with her son) from one lover to the next. Her passion for big cars seems to fit in with her sex-appeal as the men, even including Nadezhda's husband, Mike who has been the only one able to resist Valentina's spell, are 'smitten with the Rolls-Royce' she buys (256). Her lack of proper English and any education renders again her physical appeal more important, while her extreme cultural inferiority is underscored by the exaggerated sophistication of her ex and present husbands.

Lewycka explained the reason for Valentina's ruthlessness as 'she does it for the sake of her child. She breaks every law going, but no one could accuse her of being lazy or a scrounger – on the contrary, she herself is exploited' (Lewycka, in Lawless). Her behaviour is also several times explained and justified in various

ways by different characters. Nikolai excuses her as she is under the spell of Western propaganda believing that everyone is a millionaire in Britain. Nadezdha defends to her sister Valentina's style of clothes emphasising cultural differences. Her ex-husband Dubov legitimizes her actions, attributing them to her desperation and dread of being sent back to Ukraine, where 'the Wild West nature of capitalism' reigns which 'has been thrust upon' the country by 'Russians, Germans, Americans' who can only see when they look at Ukraine 'a source of cheap labour' (Lewycka, *A Short* 278, 280). Dubov also highlights the tragedy of Ukraine as 'our educated youth fly westward in search for wealth. Our national export is the sale of our beautiful young women into prostitution to feed the monstrous appetites of Western male' (280). The critique of capitalism in post-communist Ukraine relates to the perception of neoliberal Europe as primarily a market where the welfare of Europeans has lost its significance.

The prostitute-type portrayal of Valentina gains a completely different meaning examined in the light of this statement. Valentina from the role of the heartless and selfish character turns into the victim not only of her homeland but also of the West, which she has been accused of wanting to exploit. She embodies what Radulescu observed as the combination of the 'wretch' and the ''Amazon' clichés in the representation of Eastern-European women as 'they are "wretches" because of their continuous suffering, but it is also this suffering which has turned them into Amazons' (Radulescu 42). Valentina's strength and determination in her battle for staying in Britain gain the dismayed admiration of everyone around her. Roumiana Deltcheva, examining the representation of East European women in Western Cinema after 1989, noted that they 'fall into one or more of three basic negative categories and variations on them: the scrupleless slut, the conniving trickster, and the helpless victim' (Deltcheva 164). Lewycka made Valentina fit into all these categories and her highly theatrical appearances in court fighting her legal war to avoid deportation also give her an opportunity to display all of these character roles.

While, as I have argued, Valentina can be considered as the symbol of the product of, what Mike calls, 'all that neo-liberal garbage' in Ukraine, Lewycka is not sure whether Valentina is a stereotype and she claims that in fact the character is 'partly modelled on the American fortune-seeker Anna Nicole Smith. Even if she is

a stereotype, […] she is universal, not just specific to Ukraine' (Lewycka, in Bucher). The other two Ukrainian newcomers portrayed in the book, however, further strengthen the negative connotation. Valentina's friend Margaritka Zakuski shows equal consumerist attitude and determination to satisfy her needs and Valentina's sister not only fuels Valentina's discontent with anything but the latest models but a couple of months after coming to England she also quickly lures a rich English man into marriage and has no scruples about the feelings of the 'two children of school age' and the 'no-tits' wife left behind (Lewycka, *A Short* 186). When Nadia hands over to the Vicar as a donation for the poor the numerous tins of mackerel which Valentina has stocked up on just because she likes 'buy one, get one free', the food is 'donated to a family of asylum seekers from Eastern Europe' (220). This not only highlights the difference between the two women's attitudes but can also be interpreted as an allusion to the contrast between economic migrants and refugees. In contrast to the moral or economic "wretchedness" of the Eastern Europeans, the other immigrant character mentioned in the book is the sophisticated Indian clinical psychologist with excellent English, who is racially abused by Valentina.

What makes it impossible to overlook Valentina's otherness, however, is her distinctive use of the English language. When compared to the two sisters, both of whom are also of Ukrainian origin, the greatest difference between them is in their command of language. While Valentina is continuously talked about and analysed by the sisters, she lacks the linguistic and intellectual ability to talk back, which further strengthens her objectification. Although Nadia and Nikolai also speak Ukrainian, Valentina's way of speaking, her broken syntax and grammatical errors do not seem to change when talking to them presumably in Ukrainian. Even when Nadia and Valentina are quarrelling using 'the mongrel language, half-English, half-Ukrainian', Valentina's sentences are fractured and simple, while Nadia remains 'fluent and snappy' (99). Valentina's utterances are memorable for her hilarious but brutally cruel bullying of Nikolai in broken English further supporting her stereotypical portrayal. Her vulgar vocal style is set in opposition to Nikolai's sophisticated and educated speeches. The seductiveness of this stereotyping can be seen in Lawless's review, in which he declares that 'some of the finest comic moments come from the lips of the Ukrainian characters, garbling their English in

rage' (Lawless). Lewycka rejects the possibility that this type of comedy is patronising and confirms stereotypes. 'What would life be if we weren't allowed to laugh at human foibles?' (Lewycka, in Lawless) She also found 'that once you abandon the rules of 'good English', it gives you a tremendous freedom to play with the language, and to be more vivid and expressive than 'good English' will allow' (Lewycka, in Lawless).

At the same time, Lewycka is very conscious about the importance of language choice in the post-Soviet countries. Nikolai refuses to help Valentina's brother who 'talks pure Russian' but lived in Estonia and is 'so much a Russian' that he failed the Estonian Language examination and had to leave when after becoming independent the new Estonian Government wanted to expel all Russians (Lewycka, *A Short* 95). Valentina oscillates between the Ukrainian and the Russian languages and also between the nationalities. When Valentina threatens to kill Nikolai, his greatest worry is that she is using Russian language instead of Ukrainian, and observes that 'language is supremely important. In language are encapsulated not only thoughts but cultural values' (139) Valentina's violence is connected, at least for Nikolai, to her Russian side as he observes that her aggression towards him is due to 'the defect of character which is typical […] of the Russian psyche, in which there is always the tendency to believe in violence as first rather than last resort' (204).

The only occasion when Valentina is given a voice to explain her real motives is also the only moment when she shows any sign of homesickness saying 'Is better in Ukraina, Christmas' (112). She justifies her move to Britain as 'All is for Stanislav. Stanislav must have good opportunity. Is no opportunity in Ukraina. […] Is only opportunity for gangster prostitute in Ukraina' (112). However, her insistence on her son's 'OxfordCambridge University education'[43] is another sign of her desire to fulfil the Western Dream and to obtain the most fashionable education product in Western Europe, which is not based on the real abilities and aspirations of her son. Despite the fact that Valentina does not show any genuine maternal feelings towards her son throughout the book, she also personifies two other clichés of the Eastern-European character, the mother and the peasant. Her

[43] This intentional misspelling reveals the intensity of Valentina's extravagant aspirations, which exceed even reality.

peasantness, her robust naturalness becomes even more visible because of all her attempts to conceal it with her pathetic imitations of Western sophistication. Her moment comes, however, with the other stereotype, when after being cast in an inferior light for the entire book, she after giving birth becomes idealised because of her maternal qualities, the whore metamorphoses into the mother and wife and she returns to her true naturalness. As Lewycka remarked 'I didn't mean her to be unredeemed – she is redeemed by her beautiful and innocent baby, and by the love and forgiveness of her husband' (Lewycka, in Lawless). With this happily ever after ending some disturbing inconsistencies are rendered insignificant but they nevertheless still linger there. Throughout the story Valentina did not show any real inclination for domesticity and her pregnancy stays hidden and undiscussed right until the birth. The whole expectancy and birth element feels so out of place here, especially, as Deltcheva puzzled by the number of pregnant and distressed Eastern European women in Western films noted, there are 'extremely low birth rates in Eastern Europe and Russia' and there is a 'fairly open-minded attitude towards abortion, which has been readily available for decades in that part of the world' (Deltcheva 170). Deltcheva argues that in relation to the depiction of Eastern-European women 'pregnancy is manipulatively used to complete the victim/trickster portrayal' (170). Valentina's character supports this interpretation since the identity of the father is never revealed and he does not come forward either to exercise his paternal rights, the baby miraculously appears to guide the characters towards reconciliation, while the reader is kept wondering whether this whole pregnancy business happened due to Valentina's helpless state or a failed devious plan.

The only two characters who are able to stand up against Valentina are the two sisters, who, as Andrey Kurkov pointed out, have 'Ukrainian blood in their veins' but 'who have long since become law-abiding British citizens' (Kurkov). Valentina's biggest deficiency is her lack of self-control, her inclination to emotional outbursts, which is another indication of her primitive, barbarian and in this comic novel ridiculous condition, so typical of the semi-civilised Eastern part of Europe, in opposition to all the civilised and restrained English or securely assimilated characters. She leads a chaotic life uninhibited by law and order and the immigration authorities are too bureaucratic, the policemen and men in general are too seducible and useless to withstand her Amazonish magnetism, determination

and strength. So it is left for the two sisters to fight against Valentina as they have inherited from their Ukrainian mother the will and power to do so. While Vera mainly provides the know-how, Nadezdha is the one who engages in the face-to-face battle and so gets drawn into the emotional turmoil and the underworld of Britain.

Nadezdha and Vera facing a common enemy have to end their ongoing feud over their inheritance of money and character, and over their completely opposing views about nearly everything ranging from the family's past to English principles. While Nadezdha appreciates English 'tolerance, liberalism, everyday kindness' and political anarchism, Vera values in England 'fair play', discipline, order and the 'perfectly preserved class system, in which everyone knows where they belong' (Lewycka, *A Short* 241). During the story Nadezdha tries to understand how they 'grew up in the same house but lived in different countries' (241). Nadezdha who is learning about her family's life before her birth realises that the differences between her and her sister most importantly can be attributed to the ten wartime years and the places that separate their births. While Vera was a 'War Baby' born in Ukraine already part of the Soviet Union, Nadezdha was a 'Peacetime Baby' born in a country 'that had just been victorious in war' (318). On the one hand, Vera believes that 'the human spirit is mean and selfish; the only impulse is to preserve itself. Everything else is pure sentimentality' (254). On the other hand, Nadia hopes that 'the human spirit is noble and generous - […] and sometimes it's just not strong enough to withstand all the meanness and selfishness in the world' (254). Vera, just as her parents, did everything to fit in and integrate and got drawn into conservativism, while Nadezdha from the post-war hopefulness and the sixties learnt to be more socially minded.

The sisters' opposing worldviews are at first presented as a disparity and conflict between Nadia's idealist and Vera's realistic attitude towards Valentina, but later it becomes also an inner conflict for Nadia, who as a sociologist also articulates the politically correct version of how Valentina, and immigrants in general should be treated. Lechner points out that at least at the beginning Nadia is aware that in her childhood her family 'might just as well have been considered a threat to the British welfare system had it not been for the British public's perception of black migrants as the dominant threat in the 1950s' (Lechner 444). Nadia tries to analyze the circumstances, explore the background of the events

and emphasise with the participants but soon gives up and surrenders to her emotions and becomes a true ally of her sister in Valentina's deportation. Nadia, as the narrator, is guiltily reporting this negative development in her character, 'I used to be liberal about immigration – I suppose I just thought it was all right for people to live where they wanted. But now I imagine hordes of Valentinas barging their way through customs, at Ramsgate, at Felixstowe, at Dover, at Newhaven – pouring off the boats, purposeful, single-minded, mad' (Lewycka, *A Short* 160). Lewycka effectively portrays the limitations of theoretical values and moral principles on a personal level, in individual lives. Nadia's innocence concerning the criminal part of Britain is also used as an ironical device as she is a sociologist and a university lecturer, so the most educated in the whole story, but social theories seem to have no use or value in the real world.

This constant debate on immigration is intensified by the dissonance that while Vera and Nadia themselves can be considered immigrants; they are the ones who are ferociously working on deporting an aspiring one. They are, however, as second-generation immigrants completely assimilated and so English compared to Valentina, so opposite of her that their foreignness is never seriously considered. Nadia and Valentina's first encounter narrated by Nadia summarises this difference: 'I see myself through her eyes – small, skinny, dark, no bust. Not a real woman. She smiles at Mike, a slow, wicked smile. 'You like vodka? 'I've made a pot of tea,' I say' (77). Old-generation immigration and the new-comer are put into sharp contrast in the view of their differing attitudes towards the established order as, on the one hand, Valentina shows complete disregard, on the other hand, because of Valentina Nadia and her father get drawn into a criminal world previously unknown to them. As Nadia describes her parents:

> After they came to England in 1946, my parents were model citizens. They never broke the law – not even once. They were too scared. They agonised over filling the forms that were ambiguously worded: what if they gave the wrong answer? They feared to claim benefits: what if there was an inspection? They were too frightened to apply for passport: what if they weren't allowed back in? Those who got up the nose of the authorities might be sent off on the long train journey from which there was no return. (Lewycka, *A Short* 228)

All the episodes of the troubled history of Nadia's parents establish their true exile status as a contrast with Valentina's economic immigrant position. All of their suffering, which did not make them heroes but only the victims of history, made them at least worthy of British citizenship. Valentina, however, is a prime example of the new generation's opportunistic selfishness, which is also apparent in her party membership and 'prosperous and powerful' status under communism and in her clever present arrangement on claiming different benefits (33). The different characteristics of the immigrants due to generational changes are also expressed in the recurring contrast between Nadia and Vera's mother, Ludmilla and Valentina in their dissimilar educational background and in their differing approaches to cooking, housekeeping and garden. Ludmilla, who did great sacrifices to achieve her dream to become a veterinary surgeon, could never complete it because of the war. She, however, in England became an exemplary mother, cook and gardener with 'an extraordinary passion and skill of thrift', whose beautifully kept house and garden is turned into a wasteland covered by Valentina's half-used junk and infected by rats just a couple of months after Valentina's appearance (54).

Nikolai becomes attracted to Valentina not only because of her sexual appeal but also due to his loneliness, the romanticism of saving a fellow Ukrainian and homesickness for his lost homeland. The other great difference between Valentina and Ludmilla and also Nikolai is their different attitudes towards Ukraine, their contrasting attachment to the place of home. In Nadia's narration the reader learns about Ludmilla's beautiful Ukraine of cornfields and blue sky and Nikolai's history of tractors is also a homage. In contrast, Valentina is presented as a geographically mobile 'homo economicus' moving freely from one place to another in search for economic opportunity. Valenina does not show any real sense of place attachment, moreover, she is also indifferent to history. As Nikolai explains, 'she is the daughter of the Brezhnev era. […] everyone's idea was to bury all gone-by things and to become like in West. To build this economy, people must be buying something new all the time. New desires must be implanted as fast as old ideals must be buried. That is why she is always wanting to buy something modern' (170).

Valentina, and, as it is presented by Lewycka, the economic immigrants from Eastern Europe are caught up by, using Colin Campbell's concept, 'self-

illusory hedonism'. Campbell characterised this spirit of consumerism 'by a longing to experience in reality the pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty' (Campbell, cited in Gagnier 53). Due to the disillusionment in the enforced submission of the individual needs, aspirations and desires to the social state and the breaking up of traditional community values during the communism, after the political changes Eastern-European people fell unprotected prey to the 'individuated, imaginative hedonism' of the Western side and took on its economic individualism. This can explain Valentina's lacking inclination to form any attachment, to become part of any community. Probably, this lack of attachment, which appears to be the extreme version of an essentially Western value, rather than her other negative characteristics, makes Valentina unworthy of the citizenship.

In contrast to this pastlessness, the novel can be interpreted as Nadia's quest for her family's past and to understand the significance of history, memory and family myths at which point the fiction, as Lewycka acknowledged, intermingles with autobiography. Talking about her family's troubled history before arriving into England when Lewycka was only a small child, she explained that 'I simply don't know anything about that time. My parents never spoke about what they'd been through and I sensed it was better not to ask' (Smith). Writing *A Short History*, similarly to *We Are All*, was an attempt to discover and come to terms with a troubling uncertainty. In the book the sisters show different attitudes towards history. Vera with traumatic memories from the war and the labour camp wants to forget and with an established and fixed knowledge about the past she wishes to put everything behind her. Nadezhda with no first hand experience of any tragic events and no stable knowledge about the family history is consumed by an unsatisfiable desire to discover and understand her family members' often contradictory and fragmentary memories and stories. Through Nadia's enquiry into the family history, which focuses especially on her mother and the female members of the family, Lewycka combines with Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's terms, metafictional and metahistorical in order to 'deconstruct and reinterpret aspects of the historical process which have been previously silenced or been closed to their female subjects' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2). Nadezdha's

interpretation of her mother's story can also be considered as the counter history of her father's history on tractors.

Towards the end of the book when her daughter with the help of her cousins arranges a reconciliation in the family, Nadia poses silently to her daughter the same questions which Nadia herself has faced and negated, 'Doesn't she realise how time and memory fix everything? Doesn't she realise that once a story has been told one way, it cannot be retold another way? Doesn't she realise that some things must be covered up and buried, so the shame of them doesn't taint the next generation?' (Lewycka, *A Short* 296) Her answer is the same as the ultimate message given by the novel, 'it's worth a try' to uncover, to retell, to reinvestigate, to learn from the past (269). Dubov offers a similar solution for his country as 'Ukraina must find her own way. At present, alas, we accept unquestioningly everything from the West. Some of course is good; some is rubbish. […] When we can put behind us the terrible memories of the gulag, then we will begin to rediscover those things which were good in our former socialist society' (279, 280). Nikolai's book within the novel is written with the same intention in mind to get its readers to learn from the history of a technology that has brought fertility but also disaster depending on its application.

A Short History, however, finishes with a happy ending especially for the British characters and probably readers as the new immigrants return back to where they really belong, to their home country, where – as we are convinced by the rare positive images of snow, ice-skating, real fur coats and so on - will have a happier life even if it is not really safe, economically and ecologically manageable. Heather Fielding when applying Paul Gilroy's theory on convivial and melancholic versions of British national culture in the aftermath of empire to Lewycka's *A Short History* observes that 'the novel struggles between two opposed understandings of national subjectivity: is the nation defined inclusively and flexibly, by a welcoming ethic of hospitality? Or is the nation defined exclusively and rigidly, in a threatened, defensive version of what it means to be British?' (Fielding 200-201). Fielding believes that the novel is 'stuck between them' and due to Lewycka's inexperience as a first-time novelist it is most visible in 'the incoherence of the novel's ending' which should have finished with the true assimilation of Valentina into Nadezdha's family and into Britain (201). Fielding interprets the novel as a classic

bildungsroman, in which ‘Nadia, the narrator, simultaneously grows and matures by wanting to identify’ with her father and Valentina and as ‘an ethnic bildungsroman or assimilation narrative, in which an ethnic character’ – for Fielding both Valentina and Nikolai - ‘“grows” along the trajectory that culminates in his or her assimilation to the nation (205, 201). Fielding believes that Lewycka and her novel ‘however unconsciously’ expands Gilroy’s dichotomy by situating ‘conviviality within the context of melancholy’, showing ‘how conviviality can be co-opted by its opposite’, and explaining ‘how melancholia can be attractive even in the contexts where one might expect conviviality’ (215). She also argues that Lewycka’s characters are prevented from seeing ‘the contradictory structure they have enacted’ in the final deportation of Valentina (215). While Fielding rightly pointed out the intertwinement of Gilroy’s two versions of Britishness in Lewycka’s book, I believe, as I have discussed it above, that Lewycka consciously illustrates it through Nadezdha’s constant debate internally with herself and externally with her sister, Vera, whose character is completely ignored in Fielding’s review. Fielding’s insistence on the characters’ bildung is equally questionable in Nadezdha’s and Nikolai’s cases due to, on the one hand, the fact that their belonging was never really challenged and, on the other hand, due to the lack of any more than momentary identification with Valentina, which is present from the very beginning of the book and fluctuating throughout and also in Valentina’s situation because of the absence of any deeper insights into her feelings and thoughts.

While one feels obliged to accept Lewycka’s own shifting interpretation about her character, Valentina embodies, sometimes possibly unintentionally by the writer, all the possible clichés about Eastern-European women. Ukranian writer, Andrey Kurkov considered *Tractor* (with a telling shift of focus from the narrator’s story) a ‘banal tale of a Ukrainian woman who enters the UK on a tourist visa and who is prepared to go to any lengths to remain in the country’ and in his reading Valentina is pictured as ‘an assiduous but utterly evil woman’ (Kurkov). Kurkov praises the rhythm, dynamics and humour of the novel but argues that ‘the novel is not so much written as constructed, and the same can be said of the characters. Just about everyone portrayed in it inspires the sympathy of the reader except the Ukrainians, legal and illegal. What we see are caricatures’ (Kurkov). He accuses Lewycka of using the tragic history of Ukraine equally as an effective

block of her construction saying that when Nadezdha reminisces about her family's past, in reality she only 'dwells on well-known tragic events: the famine, Nazi occupation, Stalin's purges, Babi Yar' (Kurkov). Moreover, he feels that 'the hard realism of these images is in stark contrast with the grotesque main plot' giving him the overall impression of 'a school textbook on Ukrainian history with one eye on an episode of Coronation Street' (Kurkov). Lewycka reacted to Kurkov criticism as:

> It has taken me a while to understand why he hated it so much. […] Before I wrote it, I didn't know many Ukrainian Ukrainians. I knew a lot of Ukrainians who lived over here, and they all thought it was a hoot. The Ukrainian Ukrainians are quite self-conscious about Ukraine as a country because it's newly emerged on to the world stage. They always ask you what people in the west think about Ukraine, and I think, 'Gosh, what can I say?' I can't tell them that actually people in the west don't think about Ukraine at all. So I make something up, and then, when Ukraine gets to be in the news, it's about an incontinent old man and a woman with enormous breasts, and though they like the fact there's a famous Ukrainian, they hate the fact it's for something like that. (Lewycka, in Moss)

This dismissal of Kurkov's thoughtful review as the emotional outburst of one among the many over-sensitive Ukrainian Ukrainians who were 'sniffy about the book', is lamentable, especially as Andrey Kurkov is a fellow novelist with high reputation both in Ukraine and Britain (Moss). More importantly, his reaction might highlight an aspect of the novel's popularity in Britain if we consider that Lewycka played on the stereotypes of the Other so familiar and funny to the British, but offensive if it is viewed from the perspective of the portrayed ones. The attractiveness of Lewycka's style can be observed in Lechner's reasoning that the 'knowledge of a nation's stereotype of others can be seen as a form of cultural knowledge, and Lewycka uses them here both as comic relief and a means to pick up the British reader in the description of her characters' (Lechner 443). She justifies Lewycka's usage of stereotypes with their 'narrative functions on several levels by which their pejorativity is redeemed' (443). She lists examples using Marco Cinnirella's three social key functions served by stereotypes: '*social causality* (identifying a specific group as the cause of a problem or 'scapegoating') in the sisters' attitude towards Valentina to cover the family troubles, '*justification* of behaviour towards the other group' in the sisters' justification for their actions

against her, and '*differentiation* of the ingroup from other groups' in the differentiation among immigrants (443). However, as I have proved, these narrative functions of stereotypes are far from being convincing and "redeeming". Moreover, as Radulescu and Glajar observed, 'what happens to women [and to men] in society is directly related to the ways in which they are seen and represented in the imagination and in the philosophical and artistic constructions of the culture' in an interconnected process (Radulescu and Glajar 7). Therefore, they call for representations of 'the richness and diversity' of the women of Eastern Europe that manage 'to go beyond the stereotyping, essentializing, and idealizing […] and to exhibit moments of true authenticity or empowering images of women' (8).

Lewycka might have felt the need to rectify and refine the image of the newcomer immigrants as in her next book *Two Caravans* she set out 'to write a story about the human faces behind the immigration statistics which our newspapers are full of' (Lewycka, in Bucher). She dedicated it to the memory of the Morecambe Bay cockle pickers since for her the tragedy shows 'that poor people can pay with their lives for the privilege of working' and she 'wanted to pay tribute to the workers who come to Britain from all over the world, whose work we rely on to provide our high standard of living, but who remain anonymous until something like this happens' (Lewycka, in Bucher).

Despite Lewycka's insistence on the characters' realness as she claimed that all the characters were based on people she met, one cannot resist thinking that they were selected in order to satisfy the need for multiculturalism. She admits that with the two main Ukrainians she 'tried to express the conflict between the westward-looking west of the country, and the regions to the east, where people still feel very close to Russia, and speak the Russian language' (Lewycka, in Bucher). In relation to the three Poles her agenda was that in Britain there are many Polish workers, 'mostly very educated people doing jobs well below their capabilities' (Lewycka, in Bucher). While the Chinese girls were based on some of her former students, and Emmanuel's character on real young men she met on her visit to Malawi, they were probably also very much needed to give a global scope to the story, to create the possibility of introducing world-scale prostitution, and to bring in the topic of AIDS.

The form of the novel is, as Lewycka put it, 'a bit like a game of rugby. Each has the story for a little bit, and runs with it, then passes it to someone else' (Lewycka, in The View). She names Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as her inspiration for this novel. In Oliver Lindner's view with 'this fragmentation of narrative, the plot is continually broken up so that the reader has to recollect and form his own judgement. […] This postmodern form of storytelling dismisses any single version of what happens, and it powerfully underlines the complexity of migrant experience in Britain, thereby mirroring the diverse backgrounds and value systems of the characters' (Lindner 467). It seems, however, only a wishful reading by Lindner as the different interpretations of the events amount to no more than minor misunderstandings between lovers and the diverse value system of the immigrants does not seem to go much deeper than differentiating among the good characters and the villains. The good characters range from the improbably innocent Emmanuel with his angelic voice and saintly ability to better everybody, the Dog with his loyalty and devotion, the naively innocent Ukrainians, the middle-aged hippy Tomasz and the ugly so religious Marta from Poland. The two villains beyond any hope of redemption are Vitaly, the 'mobilfon-man' and the sinister Vulk who is evil 'embodied' (Lewycka, *Two* 335). When being asked about some of her characters which are clearly stereotypes Lewycka responded that 'it helps the reader if the characters seem familiar – it makes it easier for them to colour in the detail, and saves time, and pages and pages of back story if the characters resemble people they know' **(**Lewycka, in The View). These stereotypical figures, however, do not face any real dilemmas, do not go through any personality changes but only act out their assigned roles throughout the events.

The two protagonists, while showing an acute understanding about their home environment, concerning Britain express an extreme naivety. Lewycka presumably uses their youthful innocence to present the phenomenon of the preconceived dream life in the West for the wretched Eastern Europeans. Upon arriving into England and seeing the strawberry fields Irina is filled with joy and questions herself 'How had I lived for nineteen years without breathing this air? And all the cultured, brave, warm-hearted people that I'd read about in Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens [...]. I was ready to meet them' (Lewycka, *Two* 26). For Andriy England is the place where the idea of 'international solidarity' among

miners should still hold on in reality. Their innocent beliefs that British principles are present in real life as well are bitterly shattered as they cannot get out of the cruel immigrant underworld where the British they meet are only those who are, if not criminals, still the benefactors of the immigrants' exploitation. 'This is England' say Irina and Andriy separately in their horror when they unintentionally get drawn into the criminal reality previously unknown to them in their home country. The two Ukrainian protagonists, however, are not devastated by this reality as their quest is really for self discovery and true love, Andriy to forget his ex-girlfriend and Irina to escape her mother's watchful eyes.

'I have already started to think about the book I will write when I get back home,' announces Irina at the beginning of the book. 'But you have to have something interesting to write about, don't you? More interesting than a bunch of strawberry pickers living in two caravans' (65). By the end of the book she had found her story 'I started planning a new story in my head. It would be a passionate romance ... about two people who came from different worlds, but after many diversions found themselves brought together by destiny. The heroine would be a virgin. The hero would have bronzed muscular arms' (560). Although Lewycka probably only intended it as an authorial joke, she still used the necessary ingredients of a romantic comedy. Many reviewers expressed feelings of unease due to the discrepancy between the portrayed events and the humorous tone but the usage of the tragic social conditions of the immigrants as the mere background for the predictable tropes of popular romance also leaves an uncomfortable sense in the reader. Applying Stephanie Haryewski's descriptions of the Harlequin books' characteristic contents the novel's story turns into the maze 'the romance writer must construct for her pair of intended lovers' (Harzewski 25). During his quest Andriy, the hero saves Irina, the 'trembling virgin' from the villain's (here Vulk's) attempted assaults so she can reach 'her initial sexual contact' towards the end of the book with the 'inevitable happy ending' (36, 26). Lewycka might have intended it as a satirical note on the incompatibility of fiction and reality and the idealised love story of Irina and Andriy as the counterpoint for the two sub-plots of forced prostitution in the case of the other Ukrainian girl, Lena and the two Chinese girls. This is supported by Irina's regular references to the love of Natasha and Pierre in *War and Peace* and her insistent measuring Andriy's actions on the 10-grade scale

of romance. Their love scene serves a greater purpose than merely providing the reading experience of 'porn softened to fit the needs of female emotionality' if it is read in contrast with the graphically described intercourse between Vulk and his future prostitute, Lena, who has 'known this game from the age of twelve' (Harzewski 26; Lewycka, *Two* 337).

Nonetheless, it is still striking how well the represented Eastern European female characters fit again into Deltcheva's basic categories of the scrupleless slut and the helpless virgin. Deltcheva argues that the Slavic slut has become a fixture in Western cinema and 'since these women are whites from nominally European spaces, their plights appear to be less fated; i.e., their social downfall is implicitly seen as a consciously chosen path, rather than as the result of social/political circumstances imposed upon them', as it was apparent in Aldiss's novels (Deltcheva 164). Although Lewycka presents the background of Lena, abused as a child by her uncle and coming from a deprived area of Ukraine, Lena still consciously decides to join Vulk and even refuses Vitaly's warning and attempt to save her. This way Lena's story is a comfortably detached representation of the dangers Irina manages to avoid due to her moral stance and Andriy's love. Yola, the 'petite voluptuous' middle-aged woman from Poland, is callously counting her income while providing 'the additional services of private nature' to the strawberry farmer (Lewycka, *Two* 67). Despite the fact that she is forced into prostitution because she has to earn extra money to care for her son with autism in Poland, she shows a very practical approach to men and what they can be used for. Lewycka takes on the tropes of the romantic novel so much that women's fate and happiness generally depend on the men's attention and love. It is not only true in the cases of Lena, Irina, Yola but also of the background characters, such as Irina's mother, who falls into despair after being left by her husband for a younger woman, and finds happiness only through the love of another man.

The naivety and compromising traits of the immigrant characters sometimes stretch credibility as it seems that they keep falling from the hand of one exploiter into the other and everybody can take advantage of them. According to Susan Tranter, the comic treatment of 'a huge industry in exploitable immigrant labour' 'allows readers to look at aspects of UK life that we might otherwise avoid or ignore, and in that sense the method is successful' (Tranter). If we consider that

romance is read foremost as escapism from present reality,[44] the closed immigrant world which has crossing points with the British everyday life only through the service industry, with the comfortable feeling that these immigrants do not want to really assimilate, makes it a very safe and escapist enjoyment for the reader despite the tragic and gruesome reality described in it. This feeling is also supported by the function of the English language. While in *A Short* Valentina's fractured syntax and original combinations of English and Ukrainian expressions were used to express her foreignness and unassimilability among the British, here English is presented as the lingua franca of the immigrant community. Lewycka who spoke Ukrainian at home and has experience as a teacher of English as a second language is exceptionally gifted in portraying how foreigners adapt English 'to their own way of speaking and patterns of grammar' (The View). In the world of immigrants, especially among Eastern Europeans language becomes the way of national identification and the mastery of English the sign of prestige. When Irina first meets Vulk, she wonders 'what language this gangster-type would talk. Byelorussian? He looked too dark for a Belarus. Ukrainian? He didn't look Ukrainian. Maybe from somewhere out east? Chechnya? Georgia? What do Georgians look like? The Balkans? Taking a guess, I asked in Russian' (Lewycka, *Two* 48). Vulk's identity is never revealed and although he understands Russian he insists on using his broken English and so refusing any kind of mutual communality.

In the microcosm of immigrants, Eastern European internal prejudices are regularly displayed and there is hierarchy and jostling for positions. Ukrainians with other illegals are at the lowest rank and while the ancient rivalry between the central and the eastern parts of Europe and the Balkan is effectively expressed in Yola's aspiration for a higher position in the hellish environment of the chicken factory is justified as 'the supervisor of her section was a rather coarse and disagreeable Romanian woman […], who spoke appalling English' and 'Yola supposed it could only be her blonde hair ... and her Diploma in Food Hygiene from

[44] Janice A Radway in her inspirational article, 'Women Read The Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context' argues for and presents an analysis of romances, in which in addition to the traditional theoretical interpretations the investigation of the actual readers and 'what the entire act of romance reading means to the women who buy the books' are in focus (Radway 55). A similar kind of research would provide enormously interesting insights also into the interpretation of Lewycka's oeuvre. Radway's observed that one of the most important aspects of Harlequin romances' appeal was the escapism they provided for their readers.

the Polytechnic Institute at Bucharest, which anyone but a fool could see was a forgery, which had secured for her this enviable position' (240).

The grotesqueness of the British immigration laws trying to regulate immigration is also presented here when Brazilians pretend to be Portuguese to become legal but as some of the Portuguese have been 'making trouble' asking for labour rights, so 'nobody wants to take 'em on any more', the Portuguese pretend to be Brazilian (Lewycka, *Two* 254). The viewpoint of the British, for whom all Eastern Europeans seem to form an unidentifiable mass of people, is explained by the foreman in the chicken factory. 'We used to get a lot of Lithuanians and Latvians, but Europe ruined all that. Made 'em all legal. Like the Poles. Waste of bloody time. Started asking for minimum wages. […] What's the point of having foreigners if you got to pay 'em same as English?' (234). While it is a ridiculously coarse interpretation, it nevertheless dramatically depicts one real opinion of the European Union among British people. When Lewycka expressed her worries about current policy changes for immigrants coming from outside the European Union accession countries, she revealed a similar view about the immigration situation. She stated that British farmers might find it difficult to cope without the Ukrainian workers as 'they'll still have Poles, Romanians and Bulgarians but they might find that the Poles by and large don't want to do that kind of very menial work and want to save up and go home, whereas for the Ukrainians it was more of a travelling break really. It was seasonal work and Ukraine is such a deeply agricultural country that they make very good farm workers - they just know how to do it, it's in the blood' (Lewycka, in Kingston). This opinion is especially interesting as in her novel Irina is a typical middle-class urban girl from Kiev and Andriy is a miner from the mining town.

Lewycka is the most effective when she parallels the Western world's exploitative behaviour towards immigrants with its merciless abuse of animals. The character of Dog, who has escaped from dog-fights, is an essential part of the immigrant group and is even granted his own adaptation of the English language. In the section which describes the horrifying images of intensive chicken farming human and animal sufferings merge into one and so force the Western reader to realise the unforgivably inhuman conditions into which the unfortunate are forced only to satisfy the desires of the consumer society. While Tranter argues that

similarly to Lewycka's first novel, in which Valentina's high hopes about Britain and Nikolai were bitterly disappointed, in *Two* there is also 'a humorous disjunction between what the characters are searching for and what they actually find, as well as a familiar culture-clash comedy' (Tranter). In her second novel Lewycka is taking her satirical portrayal of Britain much further. As Oliver Lindner pointed out, here Britain 'seems to be a wilderness where its much-trumpeted social and cultural norms are not valid for the newcomers from the East' (Lindner 469). Tomasz having just faced the human and animal conditions which are unbelievable even for him from Eastern Europe wonders comparing the situation with Treblinka whether the inhabitants of the nearby village 'know the horror that is happening at their doorstep' (Lewycka, *Two* 263).

The only ordinary native people outside the immigrant community are the members of a dysfunctional middle-class English family, to which the foreign characters' contact source is the drug-using son saved from prison by Emmanuel in Malawi. The well-off family 'who seems to be explicitly unhappy with their sub-urban existence' are used by Lewycka to form a contrast to the group of immigrants and to convey the blunt message that, in Lindner's words, 'despite material wealth, the English lead unfulfilled lives in broken families, […] the Eastern Europeans, with the exceptions of their criminal elements, enter into honest relationships and retain their optimism' (Lindner 470). The Brirish family, however, at least show true hospitality towards the immigrants and consequently are saved from their unhappiness by adopting Emmanuel and his uncontaminated ideals about love and faith. Real kindness towards the immigrants is only expressed by the group of British people living in a forest camp commune and fighting for preservation of an ancient stone circle. Although the group just as the immigrants stand outside society, Irina and Andriy cannot fully sympathise with them either (Lewycka, *Two* 523). This community, which fights against capitalism and globalisation and the construction of 'Roads. Airports. Power stations.' where the earth's 'under assault', remains incomprehensible for Irina as she believes these investments would better her home country and for Andriy as he finds that 'the flesh and blood of living people' are much more precious than some 'stupid old stones' (554, 555, 539). This hippy community with their extensive use of drugs, surreal living arrangements and extreme disregard for gender and social roles

appear completely out of touch with reality and so does not represent a real alternative for the immigrants.

The difference between established immigrants and the new flow of Eastern Europeans is also emphasised here. Nikolai from *Tractor* appears as a resident of a nursing home and offers marriage and British passport to Irina, while an elderly lady does the same to Andriy, causing great alarm among the family members. The care assistants in the nursing home and later the Indian shopkeeper lady are the only ones who help out the characters and who having come from former colonies also have an enviable position compared to the Eastern Europeans. They not only possess secure jobs, established legal situations, mastery of English but have a much better understanding of the workings of the British society and so become the key for the newcomers to British life.

While *A Short History* dealt with the past of Ukraine, *Two Caravans* attempts to provide a simplified version of its contemporary history. Irina and Andriy are the representatives of the divided Ukraine and through their discussions the novel portrays how 'narratives […] are constructed within a historical moment' and questions the ground of any single official true version of a historical event or shows 'the (in)validity of any individual account's claims to accuracy or, ultimately, objective truth' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2,3). Moreover, by putting into opposition a male and a female character's perspective the novel also attempts, just as in *Tractor*, to draw attention to the differences between male and female or public and private interpretations. The effect of capitalism on their home country is questioned as Andriy describes the changes as 'how quickly this transformation from equal to superior had taken place. […] one day they were all comrades, next day some were millionaires and the rest had [...] coupons' (Lewycka, *A Short* 33). His and his father's story presumably is the homage to the accident already mentioned in *A Short History* that 'fourteen miners were killed in an underground explosion at Donetsk', which is mentioned there as the 'horrors' of present Ukraine (33, 32). The possible question of Ukraine's future with or without Europe is explored as the lovers regularly discuss their views about Europe. Their implied future can also be interpreted as a future for Ukraine and this way Dublov's opinion in *A Short History* that Eastern European countries have to find their own way is echoed here. While at the beginning they entertain dreams and desires to re-educate each other, they

slowly learn a more empathetic and accepting understanding of each other's approaches. Their blossoming love shows the optimistic view of the future in Ukraine, the possibility of reconciliation, as Andriy urges Irina: 'We are two halves of one country […] We must learn to love each other' (Lewycka, *Two* 534). Despite their class, cultural and political differences they are awarded a happy unity thanks to their moral integrity and perseverance.

Towards the end with the accomplished love quest for the Ukranian characters the Polish are returned home where they can find real happiness, furthermore, the fate of the Chinese girls who were tricked and sold into prostitution is softened with Andriy's dream about them, so the readers are again presented a safe and undisturbed happy ending. The evil characters get what they deserve when the Eastern European criminals kill each other and Vulk is shot by his own creature, Lena. With this move the only real danger threatening the lovers' "forever after" happiness is removed. Since during the whole story the immigrants do not want to assimilate, they do not show real desire to venture out of the immigrant community, to learn about the host country, their only purpose is to earn enough to better their lives preferably at their original home country, they can be safely depicted as victims and not aggressors. Therefore, Lewycka has comfortably and conveniently for her home audience paid her tribute to the pickers without raising real questions and dilemmas about British society and popular way of thinking.

Northrop Frye argues that the romance is 'nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream' and identifies its social role as the form in which 'the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals […] where the virtuous heroes and the beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threat to their ascendancy' (Frye 186).He observes that '[t]he perennially childlike quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space' (186). He summarises that '[t]he central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on the conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. The conflict however takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, *our* world, which is in the middle […]' (187). Andriy's quest is to return to

Sheffield, the place he visited with his father as a young child. Sheffield is twinned with his home town, Donetsk and Andriy accompanied his father on a fraternal delegation to visit the mineworkers' union and, in his father words, to 'learn about the beauty of international solidarity (Lewycka, *Two* 22). He also remembers the blind 'renowned visionary ruler of the city' who welcomed them 'warmly with a long-long speech about solidarity and the dignity of labour' (22). For Andriy, and for Lewycka and her readers, international solidarity and the dignity of labour are the real objects of desire, the values lost in both sides of Europe. However, Britain, using Northrop analogy, infected completely and laid waste and barren by neoliberal consumer society with competition and selfish individualism – which values are most apparent in the behaviour of the criminal underworld – needs the fertile energy of the uncontaminated Eastern European, who still holds dear the political, social and economic dreams of the post-War Western-European societies. The search for the imaginative golden age and place for Lewycka is for a united Europe, or preferable for a united global society.

Alice O'Keeffe interprets the title of Lewycka's third novel *We Are All Made of Glue* as the thesis that unites the 'disparate themes (hence the "glue" metaphor) is that what holds us together is more important than what drives us apart' (O'Keeffe). To prove her point Lewycka manages 'through a series of not-quite-credible twists of fate' to cram into an old house called Cannan house, where 'even the name exuded a musty whiff of holiness', an old Jewish lady Mrs Shapiro, who is a Second World War refugee from Germany, Mr Ali, his nephew Ishmail, and his friend Nabeel from Palestine, and Chaim Shapiro having just arrived from Israel (O'Keeffe; Lewycka *We* 21). The building is situated 'somewhere between Stoke Newington and Highbury' but it is an imaginary London which suitably for the plot is free of crime or intercultural problems and where the 'biggest threat to social harmony comes from an array of slimy estate agents and meddlesome social workers - none of whom turns out to be as sinister as he or she appears' (O'Keeffe; Lewycka, *We* 21). The life of the inhabitants is orchestrated by the goodhearted Georgie from Kippax, whose ignorance of geography, history and politics creates the opportunity to explore the background of the characters and whose sound working class, miner and Labour background generates the appropriate climate for discussion and union.

When facing the terrible stories of the characters Georgie wonders, ‘How could a Jew who was himself the survivor of the death trails of Europe act with such casual cruelty against the hapless civilians of his promised land?’ and so renders the Israel-Palestine conflict a European issue (669). Moreover, Lewycka, by removing the characters from their homelands and so from the conflicts, can focus on their shared humanity, for example, their passion for television and barbeque. The civilising nature of Britain is most apparent in the case of Chaim, who finds that ‘it is impossible for someone so sensitive like’ him to live in Israel and who – resentful, angry and disappointed – escapes to Britain and who without his shoulder-padded crumpled suit is ‘just a sweaty middle-aged man in a polyester shirt’ with one glass eye, which is not only a casualty from the troubles but a symbol of his distorted vision. A couple of months in London, however, have changed him so much that he ‘looks so completely different’ that Georgie almost does not recognize him in his black jeans, blue open-necked shirt and stylish rimless glasses which make his glass eye nearly unnoticeable. What is more, he is absolutely content with his new job ‘at a travel agent’s specializing in Holy Land tours’ (816, 817). A reversed transformation takes place when ‘gentle, animal-loving coffee-making Arsenal-supporting’ Nabeel has to go back to Palestine to become the head of the family due to his older brother’s death. Georgie’s ‘heart aches’ as she cannot imagine him ‘as head of anything’ and as going back to Palestine also stops him enjoying a fulfilled British life (828). Although the two young Palestinian men’s English is limited to ‘Hello. Please. Welcome.’, they seem to settle down happily in Britain. (622) While a reader can rightly wonder about why the characters show so little place attachment to their home left behind as they only talk about the troubled history, Georgie, on the contrary, several times expresses her puzzlement why all these people ‘go on about their homeland as it was the biggest thing in their lives’ (790). She concludes that ‘surely, what really matters is the people we are attached to?’ (707). Or when she ponders the Israel-Palestine conflict ‘who had started it? Whose fault it really was?’, she works out that ‘maybe, that was the wrong question to ask in the first place. If you could just get the human bonding right, maybe the other details – laws, boundaries, constitution – would all fall into place’ (712). And so it does, at least in the book, which finishes with a general happy ending for the characters having finally found

the right vocations and partners for life in Britain. To complete this general happiness Lewycka includes that ‘peace has broken out in Northern Ireland’, although ‘who’d have thought it was possible’ (808).

The tone of that part of the novel which is clearly created to allow Lewycka to deal with the Holocaust and the Palestine-Israel conflict alternates between the emotionally shocking personal memories and the plainly didactic explanations. This theme, however, occupies only a subplot status in Georgie’s saga of the past love story, then the separation and finally the reconciliation with her husband, which oscillates between “chick” and “hen lit”, and so true to the genre it does not disturb the slightest the romantic and hopeful tone of the novel. This might be the reason why Lewycka, who had been walking on the borderline between critically and popularly acclaimed black comedy and tasteless exploitation of stereotypes and historical tragedies, with this novel overstepped the line for most of the critics. As Olivia Laing aptly put it, ‘the fusion of Holocaust drama and knockabout comedy makes for an uneasy, occasionally nauseating mix’ (Laing). Moreover, the glue theme that is introduced as Georgie is a freelance contributor to the *Adhesives in the Modern World* magazine apparently provides answer for all of her questions and so ‘the chemistry of adhesive bonding might reveal the essential truth of everything from handcuff-bound sex to the Arab-Israeli conflict’ (Laing). Lewycka’s apparent solution for every possible human problem, which is finding the common humanity, unfortunately, does not amount to more than oversimplification and the complete disregard for the cultural and individual subtleties. While Lewycka writes about modern British life with such an empathetic and humorous outlook, she seems to be caught by the same fascination with people who have experienced tragic events that does not let Georgie rest. ‘Were they exceptional people, or had the time that they lived through made them exceptional? Had our safe postwar world stripped all the glamour and heroism out of life […]?’ (Lewycka, *We* 778).

When during her conversation with Shehadeh, Lewycka expressed her worries about whether with *We Are All* she had achieved anything substantial, Shehadeh reassured her that what she had done is ‘at the heart of what needs to be done’ as the Palestinian voice is silenced and ‘when someone without preconditions or preconceptions’ describes what they see then they are ‘doing something very important’ (‘Peak’). I would, however, disagree as Lewycka,

although seemingly dealing with contemporary controversial topics, dishes them out in easily digestible formats for her addressed audience and so transforms them into mere fictional devices which fit nicely into the British perspective without encouraging or inspiring the readers to revise or reconsider their ideas and beliefs.

Lewyvka in her fourth novel, *Various Pets Alive and Dead*, published in 2012 investigates another contemporary issue again: the financial crisis which swamped the world's economies, just as John Lanchester's novel *Capital* (2012) and Sebastian Faulks's *A Week in December* (2009). The banking environment in 2008 is depicted through the eyes of Serge, the son of two ex-hippies Doro and Marcus. He is not only seduced away from his parents' ideals and from pursuing a Cambridge PhD by the wealth and power of his new position as a quantitative analyst at an international investment bank but is also under the spell of his only female colleague, Maroushka from Ukraine. Amanda Craig appraisingly described Maroushka's figure as 'yet another of Lewycka's Ukrainian seductresses whose broken English fails to conceal a ruthless grasp of finance' so unintentionally summarising all the stereotypical elements that characterise Lewycka's portrayal of Eastern European women (Craig). Also, Bill Greenwell praised Lewycka's humor with a telling shift of Britain from Europe 'as in her previous work, the European characters' directness when coupled with their idiom is hilarious' (Greenwell). Although, as Serge comments, Maroushka is the 'only daughter of distinguished academics […], graduate cum laude from the prestigious European university of Zh - … wherever', and she has 'enrolled for a PhD in maths at University College London', the simplicity and brokenness of her English resembles Valentina's in *A Short History* (Lewycka, *Various* 6). While she has apparently no problem understanding academic, professional or slang English, Maroushka, just like Valentina, lacks the ability to express any complex thoughts or deeper feelings. Moreover, she does not show any desire or need to do so. She regularly shows her contempt towards analysing the situations. 'In my country exist nothing only words!' (248). It is interesting how Lewycka denies her Eastern European characters any deeper analytical skills and does not allow them to think outside of the parameters of their role cast upon them by their countries of origin. While it can be argued that Maroushka represents only an individual character, she articulates and posits herself as the representative of her country and the bearer of special knowledge

thanks to her cultural background. Her portrayal as the speaker of simplicities about the other side of Europe stands out among the nuanced sympathetic representations of the other characters. The warmth with which Lewycka portrays her characters seems to be missing when turning to Eastern Europeans.

The stereotypical Eastern European "Amazon" figure emerges again as she is 'the only girl' among the quants and not only can she 'hold her own' when it comes to eating and drinking but she also 'thinks she's cleverer than virtually everybody' (9,8). In the international cast of bankers, where people are identified and judged according to their nationalities, she is the only one who never shows weakness or moral scruples. She is a figure who is the embodiment of the financial world, as she does not only play the part, as Serge and the other men opportunistically but half-heartedly do, but believes in and is dedicated to it with absolute assurance. While the other foreign characters from Hamburg, France, Finland and the Netherlands fit easily in the cosmopolitan financial world, Marouskha's foreignness is constantly emphasised and functions as an insistent reminder of the split between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe. If we take her figure as the symbol of Eastern Europe her career from cleaning the office floor to the head of the quants in the glass-walled office through the help of her affair with the boss indicates a significantly altered power balance in Europe's financial market. Her amazing career advancement is also facilitated by a mistrust for the 'continentals' because of the previous Finnish head's breach of trading rules. However, it happens despite the fact that her colleagues have envisaged that 'to be managed by Maroushka would resemble being indentured simultaneously to Kristen Davis and Attila the Hun' (222).

Her sexuality is also emphasised in parallel with the book's allusion to and comparison between financial and sexual drives. As Lewycka warned about 'the predatory forces of the global markets', the novel illustrates that the greatest advantage in the financial world is the carnivorous preying instinct (Lewycka, 'I'). The boss, called Chief Ken, is 'the top dog in the pack' and looks like 'a mature hunting' Dobermann (Lewycka, *Various* 34, 33). The managers' masculine predatory thirst for success, money and women in Maroushka's case is transformed into the amalgamation of the Eastern European 'trickster' and the 'whore' stereotypes into a character who successfully advances her career by

seducing her colleagues and finally the top officer. Her insatiable appetite is also apparent in her attitude towards food as she is portrayed mostly consuming junk food in a sexually charged manner, which Serge finds irresistible. Her entrancement with food is paralleled with her interest in clothing in an environment where appearance and the clothes one wears define the person's value. This is set in opposition to the communist and post-communist life standards, furthermore, with the vegetarian diet and shared clothing in the hippy commune where Doro, Marcus and their children used to live. As Maroushka states, 'free market is superior form of economic organisation. I have experienced life in planned economy. Bad food. Bad clothe. Bad house' (214)

Her Eastern European stereotypical "whore" character is further highlighted when she is likened to the other female characters. Doro and Marcus's eldest child, Clara, is a schoolteacher with great dedication in a poor community in Doncaster and her longing for real love is affectionately portrayed. In contrast, Serge concludes that girls like Maroushka are 'attracted to power and wealth. They can't help it, it's in their DNA' (110). Serge himself juxtaposes Maroushka to his ex-girlfriend, Babs, whose yearning for home and family scared him away. All the other female characters express the 'true' feminine instinct of caring, being mothers, teachers or doctors, while Maroushka with her restless pursuit of money and power is the distilled personification of the exploitative ruthless world of finance. Serge can only escape her bewitchery and with it the moral degradation with the help of another woman who is the embodiment of female caring. The figure of the Indian lady doctor functions as another of Lewycka's tropes, the politically correct version of immigrant portrayal set in opposition with the Eastern European characters. Dr Dhaliwal not only comes from a colonial migrant family and so in Lewycka's fictional world is a true citizen, but she is also the complete opposite of Maroushka with her earnest and natural appearance and selfless kindness. The reader is reassured about the rightness of Serge's choice between the two ladies as Dr Dhaliwal can fit smoothly in Serge's family and conveniently for the happy ending also quickly becomes pregnant. In the case of Marouskha the ruthless economic immigrant is also depicted as she does not show any sign of place attachment but regularly expresses contempt and hatred towards her home country, which is also portrayed through Serge's internet search as 'big shabby

concrete buildings, grim squares with sad people in shapeless clothes, and dreary statues of guys no one has heard of' (221). Serge concludes that 'it definitely looks like a place to avoid' and that it is no wonder Maroushka 'wants to hop over to the West' (221). She is also straightforward and open about her desire for a British visa and expresses real emotions only when she again, thanks to her involvement with Chief Ken, gets near achieving her ultimate dream, British citizenship, which for her is 'better money opportunity' and 'big Anglo-feel' of 'Queenlizabeth fishanchip cuppa tea Royal Navy Witcliff of Dover' (333). However, Maroushka needs the British passport in reality as it would also allow her the admission to the community of the 'beautiful young high-flying free-floating no-baggage global elite, whose title is wealth, whose passport is brains, whose only nation is money' (61).

In fact, Maroushhka is not only unique in her lack of feelings and her unscrupulousness among the female but also among the male characters. She is the only true villain in the book as even her boss, Chief Ken, shows his emotional side concerning his son with Down syndrome. Only for Marouskhka is there no redemption – despite Serge's several attempts to save her by marriage or an escape to Brazil - as she is not really an individual but a human product of capitalism conquering the barren souls left by communism. In addition, her personality is developing in a negative direction with her rising career and growing power, since at the beginning there were some flickering signs of a childish innocence but they disappear completely after her new position. Her figure as an example of women in her country as products of failed communism and now reigning free-capitalism is supported by the image of her mother, who looks like her 'but older, with a shapeless grey perm and bad front teeth' and about whom the only information shared by Maroushka is her expensive breast enlargement surgery to 'make nice big breast. Men like it' (6).

The question is naturally not whether the history and the present have impact on the lives of people but whether this oversimplified representation is helpful in any sense. Lewycka's intention might have been to create a burlesque figure by mushing together all the typical clichés but it is nearly impossible to see Marouskha merely as an ironical metaphor which serves as a caricature of the Western European male gaze on Eastern European women. The only allusion that supports this interpretation is the fact that her otherness generates preposterous

conjectures about her real identity and sexual conduct among the office workers and the fact that her character is presented by the third-person narrator which alternates between an objective narrative voice and a subjective one limited to Serge's impressions and feelings. Maroushka is looked at from a different point of view only towards the end of the book when she is seen through the eyes of Doro. Maroushka, the irresistible seductress is reduced to a girl who is 'quite pretty, but too thin, and wearing 'far too much make-up' and 'ridiculously high heels' (356).

It is much easier to consider Maroushka as the counterpoint of Oolie, the youngest child of Doro and Marcus, in the sense that both of them are interested mainly in food and sex but Oolie is driven by love while Maroushka by greed. Many reviewers praised the empathetic but realist portrayal of Oolie, who has Down syndrome, but her character, as it is customary for Lewycka to use her characters as an embodiment of a notion or idea, also becomes the symbol of disinterested, selfless love and altruism connected to her. The same is true in the case of the other character with Down syndrome, Willy, who is not only the son of Chief Ken but also becomes the love interest of Oolie. While the players of the financial world value everything according to its productivity in financial terms, Chief Ken observes that Willy has shown him 'what really matters in life' (256).

Marouskha's cynicism and disillusionment also allows Lewycka to satirize Doro and Marcus's communist principles taken too far. Leyla Sanai sees the book as a representation of the financial crisis 'from the perspective of opposing camps': ex-hippies with 'a hatred of capitalism' and capitalists (Sanai). In Sanai's interpretation Maroushka is 'a scythe-sharp capitalist from Ukraine' and she argues that Lewycka, just as in her first two novels, 'deftly captures the material appetite of Eastern European immigrants who, unlike liberals in the free world who may romanticise communism, know its grim reality and strive assiduously for something better' (Sanai). The opposition between caring and self-interest is a symbol of Europe drawn between two attitudes: welfare state and free market. Maroushka believes that great Britain's biggest problem is 'too much taxes' as in her country 'only pay pensioners and persons too unintelligent to avoid' and Chief Ken would eliminate public services as they are 'not productive' as 'nobody's making money out of them' (Lewycka, *Various* 224, 336). On the other side there are Doro and Marcus's memories and remaining ideals from the time 'in the late sixties and

seventies' when they lived in a 'non-bourgeois non-private non-nuclear non-monogamous community […] based on Marxism, vegetarianism, non-violence, non-competitiveness, creativity, communal ownership' and so on (22, 42).

In the novel Marcus is mainly presented while writing the history of the theories and principles of this period, meanwhile through Doro's flashbacks and bursts of feelings a female counter history is taking shape. Lewycka with the help of metahistory and metafiction, just as in *A Short History,* questions the validity of the official male-centred factual history and political, social theories. Doro's recurring attempts to revaluate and reinterpret the past in order to gain a clearer understanding of the present and her children's beliefs, lives and actions form a more fully human and accurate version of the past. Although this process of remembering and reassessment puts her ideals, beliefs and even memory itself in flux, it is still more authentic than any other interpretation of the past and the present. Her observation can also be applied to Europe that 'they'd been so certain in those days; so convinced of the rightness of their mission. Her whole life since then has been a journey backwards into uncertainty – from knowledge to doubt; from black and white to shades of grey' (294). Through the process of remembering Doro examines the individual side of the principles and the patchiness of their realisation. Marcus is still trying through his writing to reinterpret and actualise the theories for the sake of the next generations. He facing the possibility of a terminal illness feels that 'there is so much he could contribute', 'if only he didn't feel so tired all the time' (366).

Just as the commune represents the extreme theory and practical application of the welfare state, Doro is the symbol of over-caring in the novel. Her inability to let her children leave the nest is especially acute in the case of Oolie, who is 'her surprise accomplishment, even more than Clara and Serge,' 'out of all the chaos, fun and disappointment of the commune' (122). The older generation represented in the novel could not revolutionize European society, could not create a better world for their children but at least planted some seeds of ideas and values in them. For despite or because of all the description of self-interest, ruthlessness and inhumanity of the financial world, the ultimate message of the novel is the value of caring for others and so it is a statement in support of the European social model of welfare states. This element of the novel is further strengthened by

Clara's side of the story as 'the effects of the economic crash on ordinary people are evident in the community' in which she works and this way Lewycka affectively depicts the human perspective of the financial crisis (Sanai).

Many reviewers interpreted the book as the examination of the differing values and morals of different generations, Sarfraz Manzoor, however, pointed out that Lewycka pictures how the utopian ideas of the older generation also 'fell victim to the human frailties of lust and envy', which very same 'frailties afflict the children' (Manzoor). Moreover, Serge argues at the beginning of the book that his generation is doing just the same as his parents' generation in the late sixties and seventies when they 'threw off the shackles of convention and freed themselves to experiment with completely new ways of living' (Lewycka, *Various* 22). For Serge this is 'creating completely new formulae for managing risk, setting money free to roam the world in search of undreamed-of returns' (22). Serge's job is 'to take the riskiness out of risk with the wizardry of mathematics' in the financial and political world presented in the novel, which desperately convinces itself about the infallibility of free market economy and 'the wisdom of the market' (3, 109). Lewycka effectively depicts what William Mitchell calls 'the neo-liberal nightmare' of the groupthink concerning the myth that fiscal discipline, the enforcement of extensive cutbacks to social welfare systems and widespread deregulation 'will allow a free-market to maximise wealth for all' (Mitchell 14, 8). When the economic crisis hits the banking world its actors are formulating justifications for the fact that 'neo-liberal economics privileges the interest of capital and the financial elites' (10). As Maroushka blatantly articulates, 'in Soviet time, all persons were average. Now we have rich elite. These persons are more intelligent. I am also intelligent. So why not me?' (Lewycka, *Various* 260).

Meanwhile, Lewycka suggests what sharply contrasts the two generations, as Manzoor observed, is that the older generation 'truly did believe we were all in this together' (Manzoor). As the hippies' children put it, 'they had something they believed in. […] Values and stuff – it all seems a bit retro' (108-109). Shehadeh commented on a world-wide rise of conservatism amongst the young 'which manifested itself in the young wanting to manage their lives, and ensure that they can survive professionally' and in that they lacked activism ('Peak'). Lewycka completely shares his opinion and claims that when they grew up 'there was a

belief in the political process and in mass movements' but 'things have become much more individualised now. Young people in particular often search for identity, to discover who they are. But sadly their identity often becomes defined by their religion or race rather than by who they are as human beings' ('Peak').

Lewycka, however, when turning to the representation of Eastern European characters, mainly Ukrainian women, seems to follow a similar trajectory defining them only by their nationality. She takes on the role of stopping the silence surrounding them in British literature; moreover, she might consciously use stereotypes with the intention to unsettle them with the help of caricature and burlesque. Yet, as I have attempted to show, her narrative does not truly undermine and question these conventional clichés, on the contrary, they are reaffirmed, as it is also apparent in the reviews. Her novels do not deconstruct the categories of Western and Eastern identities comfortably set from the British perspective and do not open up possibilities for a more thorough understanding, but they tend to flatten out the complicated particularities of individual lives into a generalized typecast. Although she presents herself and her literary persona is publicised based on her parents' origin, her works seem to work contradictory to all of these as she does not provide real voices for her characters from Eastern Europe.

Lewycka's practice can be especially harmful because of the public anxiety about immigrant issues. She claims to be an authority on the subject of Eastern Europe and has successfully convinced her audience about this; he has been invited by prestigious newspapers to write about the Ukrainian conflict and on Eastern European literature. She found Laurie Graham's novel *Life According to Lubka* about Bulgarian characters an uncomfortable read as she reflects, 'Whereas I feel perfectly OK lampooning eastern Europeans myself, I don't much like it when other people do it. It's like having outsiders criticise your family – they may be crazies, but they're my crazies' (Lewycka, in Spinning). Rachel Morley analysing the debate over Helen Dermidenko/Darville's book *The Hand that Signed the Paper*[45] observed the importance of 'the way readers instinctively draw parallels

[45] In 1995 Helen Demidenko, the author of the multi-award winning holocaust novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper* was revealed not to be Demidenko, 'daughter of Ukrainian and Gaelic migrants, as she told the Australian public, but Helen Darville', daughter of an English-born couple (Morley 73).

between the acts of writing and speaking and between the body of the text and the body of the writer' (Morley 78). As Morley reasons, while authorless criticism is 'an ideal practice in theory, 'it does not translate into the actuality of reading or the act of interpretation', moreover, 'readers construct authors to suit their interpretation of the speaking subject' (77, 80). Lewycka, who only after her first book's success established a connection with her long-lost relatives in Ukraine and visited the country, in British literary and cultural space has become, partly as a response to the public interest and demand, an authoritative voice promoting multiculturalism and an understanding of immigrant mentality. Talking about *Caravans* Lewycka explained that she originally wanted to write a sequel but her publishers were against it, so she embarked on something new and only when *Tractors* 'became more and more successful, they started to get nervous' and advised Lewycka to return to a similar topic (The View). This is the reason why, as Lewycka feels, *Two Caravans* 'is the same, but different' from *A Short History* (The View). Morley calls for unravelling 'the philosophical links that continue to inform society's approach to literature as an act of responsibility and accountability', as well as examining the way the author and the critic 'impact on the text's relationship with the readers' (Morley 82). Her conclusion is that biographicisms are and can be used 'in the act of interpreting and analysing the way a text operates in cultural practice; that is, the way it is read and the way in which the author, along with a range of other devices (and this is the key), is used in the circulation of the discourse' (83). She argues for moving 'beyond ideology and into the realities of reading' as 'texts like language are marked by instability and interdeterminacy, yet they are also marked by the reader's desire to implicate a point of origin or position of address' (84).

My reservations about Lewycka's portrayal of Eastern European immigrant characters should be taken as questions about the opinions in the British society it mirrors and the views among the audience it attempts to match, in addition to the enquiries about the elements of more effective representations rather than as mere criticism. Lewycka's intellectual seriousness with which she is trying to envision a better, more united Europe which places social values ahead of material gain, and which functions to care for the social, cultural and physical well-being of her citizens is admirable. She also possesses an enviable belief in a meaningful Europe, and a European destiny on the levels of the continent, the nations, and the

individual. These notions are subjected to close scrutiny in Tim Parks's novels *Europe* and *Destiny*.

Chapter 6

Europe as a Destiny

When ‘European writers’ were sharing ‘their visions for the future of the continent’ in 2010 in the Guardian’s series ‘My Europe’ Tim Parks talking about his feelings during the 1980s and 1990s ‘as the European community expanded and consolidated’ explained his suspicion as ‘It was the phobic, defeatist tone of the rhetoric that was so discouraging. Scared of another war between ourselves, we had to tie ourselves together in a mesh of commercial rules and regulations governed by tier after tier of bureaucracy’ (Parks, ‘Europe needs’). This claustrophobic sense of Europe is throat-tighteningly depicted in the coach journey of Parks’s novel *Europa* published in 1998. The book’s very first sentences set up the tone of the whole journey and the narrator-protagonist’s emotional response to it.

> I am sitting slightly off-centre on the long back seat of a modern coach crossing Europe. And this in itself is extraordinary. For I hate coaches, I have always hated coaches, and above all I hate modern coaches, not just because of the strong and nauseating smell of plastics and synthetic upholstery, but because of the way the supposed desires of the majority are now foisted upon everybody – I mean myself – in the form of videoscreens projecting from beneath the luggage rack every six seats or so, and of course the piped music oozing from concealed loudspeakers. (Parks, *Europa* 3)

The protagonist-narrator is Jerry Marlow[46], an English man who works as a lecturer in Milan in Italy and in the course of the novel he accompanies, even if rather as an outsider onlooker, his colleagues ‘from France and Germany and Spain and God bless us even Ireland’ and some Italian university students showing support for their teachers in order to take a petition to the European Parliament in Strasburg against the university’s attempt to reduce their salaries and limit the contractual length of their employment time (20). While Delanty pointed out that of

[46] Although Parks has never mentions any connection, his character’s name brings to mind Charlie Marlow’s figure in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

‘the wide range of political philosophies, ideals, movements that have characterised European modernity, the tradition that is most distinctively European is the aspiration for social justice’ (Delanty, ‘Is There’), this idea and with it the European Union are quickly undermined by Jerry’s claustrophobic description of the journey and his interpretation of their venture as

> the enormous waste of time it will no doubt be going through the bureaucratic procedure of presenting our petition to a European Parliament whose exact functions and powers and suffrage none of us understands [….] and on the way back we will have to discuss the importance of what we have achieved and mythologize it and tell ourselves we did well to come and now we are safer, meaning that we can feel more secure that we will continue to receive our salaries for some time to come. (Parks *Europa* 20-21)

His slightly off-centre position on the long back seat of the ‘powerful modern coach setting out across Europe’ reflects the fact that Jerry’s character is also a representative of Britain’s previously central but now backbench position in the European Union (9).

Parks masterfully combines four dimensions in the novel: the reality of the journey, the narrator’s inner monologue – itself a mixture of present impressions – and the past reminiscence of a love relationship, and the continuous allusions to Europe as Parks uses all the characters to symbolise national stereotypes and the coach as the European Union. The trip to the European Parliament is organised by Vikram Griffith, who is ‘affectedly shabby, determinedly Indian, though brought up entirely Welsh’ and who with his complex ethnicity ‘cannot be president, because too conflictual and too crazy, but who nevertheless, despite holding no official position in the union at all, is effectively our leader anyway’ (7, 39). The official ‘presidente’ of the union of the teachers is Dimitria, a Greek woman, whose ‘most characteristic gesture’ is ‘to offer her resignation so that she can then be begged to withdraw it’ and who Jerry finds completely ‘unpleasant in her busy busyness, the denim jeans, denim jacket, and in a sort of righteous truculence that glowers under the brightest Greek smile and lipstick’ (38, 45). Barnaby Hilson, experimental novelist of middle-class Protestant Dublin family and bland good looks’ who on the coach played ‘traditional Irish tunes on his traditional Irish tin whistle’ offers to

become the representative of the group in front of the European Parliament as 'an Irish person would never put the backs up of the powers-that-be in the Community the way a German, a French, or above all a British representative might. Because Ireland […] was a weak member of the Community and a willing member and clearly represented the *oppressed* rather than the oppressor on *the international world stage*' (143, 148).

Even the vehicles on the road can be used as symbols of the division of Europe as Jerry's analysis shows 'the coach lurched to avoid some miserable humpy machine from backward Eastern Europe where they never learnt to build cars the way we did' (105). Parks in his autobiographical essay entitled 'Europe', which is based on a similar real life coach journey, already reflected on this image. 'It was that very special time in history when quaint rustboxes […] were monopolizing the slow lanes of every Western European highway. […] Czech and Polish drivers waved to us from behind broken windscreen wipers – it was still a brave new world to them' (Parks, 'Europe' 44). In the novel the difference between the two parts of the economically and so mentally still divided Europe is highlighted by the description of the comfort provided by the Western coach as

> the synthetic red velvet [of the coach's seats] that looks so plush, that promises such luxury, the way all that is modern promises such luxury, invites such complacence, such sitting back in this world of paved roads and metalled directions, gleaming surfaces, reclinable seats, this world where everything is ready for us, technically, to be happy. (Parks, *Europa* 105)

The decadence of the western world is deduced from setting a presumed Western-Eastern opposition without actually ever investigating the Eastern side either in the novel or in the essay. The abyss between the two sides of Europe can be, however observed when comparing this coach journey to the one described by Végel in *Bűnhődés*, which depicts the guest workers' road to Europe. It is quite dramatic to realise how close their places of departure are geographically.

Eastern Europe for Parks is more a symbol of unspoilt reality, the opposing other as, for example, before Jerry's hypocritical public speech in the European Parliament the Committee was hearing an appeal for Bosnia. Bo Stråth highlights that the construction of Eastern Europe for the Western side means 'a paradox of

simultaneous inclusion and exclusion: Europe but at the same time not Europe' (Stråth, 'Multiple' 393). In 'Europe' the 'Western' coach passengers were spending the time by 'waving to the Trabants' while 'someone was lamenting the fact that at twenty-two she still hadn't achieved an '*equilibrio interiore*' (Parks, 'Europe' 44). Reflecting on the luxury of the coach in comparison of the Eastern vehicles, this lament and Plato's *Republic* Parks concludes that Plato's 'ideal, more real realm beyond' is a way of 'expressing a mental space, a place of yearning that is in all of us: for things to be still, for everything to be settled, defined and resolved: our jobs, our loves, our lives' (Parks, 'Europe' 44). Elbe has pointed out that Nietzsche connected the beginning of the 'process by which European existence had traditionally been endowed with a greater sense of meaning' to Plato (Elbe 36). As Elbe summarises this process entailed invoking a metaphysical distinction 'between a meaningful world, where the more eternal and "true" meaning of existence resided, and a less valuable realm of earthy existence characterised by flux and uncertainty' (Elbe 36). While in the novel the older characters are going through all kinds of life, professional and identity troubles, the young Italian students seem to be at a much greater ease with their lives and embody Parks's final conclusion that 'for those of us who live today in Italy, in Germany, in France, though not perhaps in England, that mental space is most frequently expressed in the word Europe, in our idea of the European Home where we live in permanent peace and prosperity' (Parks, 'Europe' 45). As Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council in his Nobel Peace Prize Lecture pointed out in 2012, '[t]oday's youth are already living in a new world. For them Europe is a daily reality. Not the constraints of being in the same boat. No, the richness of being able to freely share, travel and exchange' (Van Rompuy).

For Parks, however, this new world seems to realize more powerfully 'in the strong and nauseating smell of plastics and synthetic upholstery', the common will 'foisted upon everybody […] in the form of videoscreens [….] and of course the piped music oozing from concealed loudspeakers', and the 'complacence, such sitting back in this world of paved roads and metalled directions, gleaming surfaces, reclinable seats, this world where everything is ready for us, technically, to be happy' (Parks, *Europa* 3, 105). Despite travelling through Europe and the protagonist's inner rambling, the landscape does not feel to change as crossing the

continent for these travellers means only being on the road and visiting only service stations

> built as it was to be expected in the ubiquitous Euro-architecture of curved cement-and-glass surfaces, with generous bristle of flagpoles outside displaying the colours of every nationality the franchise-holders hope to make money from and inside a sense of disorientation generated by flights of steps and walkways and signs that are no longer in any languages but just cups and knives-and-forks. (55)

The building of the European Parliament as Jerry observes 'might well have drawn its inspiration from a study' of the service station and reflects based on Plato's thoughts in *The Republic* that this architecture mirrors the longing of 'the visionary architects of our United Europe' for the world to declare its final form and be still, or at least for all motion to be neutralized in repetition, in ritual,[…] for each man to assume his definitive station, forever, each role to be exactly defined and assigned, forever, authority imposed, balance achieved, justice done. Thus Europe. […] Ultimate solidarity in a world where perfected technique will remove all suffering' (190). Even Europe's heritage is standardised as Jerry reflects 'leaning against a post forbidding parking, that every major monument in Europe is now cleaned and floodlit. […] These monuments have been *neutralized by the light* […] They have been made part of a modern city. They have been subtracted from us and made possible for us' (152). Hammond commented on how Brussels as a response to its crisis of legitimacy 'has sought to encourage a transfer of allegiance from the national to supranational level, hoping that the psychological attachment to a European polity will build consent for new forms of governance' (Hammond 12). Not only the traditional emblems of state (a flag, anthem, currency, etc) were created Hammond argues that '[m]ore insidiously, it seeks to build social cohesion and consensus in the symbolic realm of culture, hoping that its greater emotional appeal will create a 'cultural Europe' that works to endorse political Europe' (12). He warns that

> [w]hat this European pan-culturalism means in practice is the insertion of 'an elusive' "Euro-content" into citizens' lives via cultural heritage programmes, university exchanges and written, audio and visual materials […]. The aim of what Jonas Frykman calls 'one of the most

> dramatic culture-building processes since the nationalization of Europe's geography' is an homogenised collective self, a 'unity in diversity', as the European Commission calls it, that is not that different to the 'multiculturalism' by which national-political elites have defined and managed cultural difference for the purpose of assimilation. In this sense, Europism entails not only the essentialist logic of nation-state adapted to an entire continent but also a reformulated Europeanisation, amended from its former usage on colonised populations abroad to the ideological reeducation of Eurosceptics at home. (Hammnond 12-13)

In this faceless Europe the sterility of modern European architecture, the illuminated monuments and the technocratic nature of the European Union are also accompanied by the spread of mass and consumer culture. In the hotel every 'shamelessly anonymous room' is decorated by 'miserable simulacrum of a great modern masterpiece' (Parks, *Europa* 119, 166). During the journey Jerry does not read Plato but is holding and studiously not reading a 'miserable novel' given to him by his eighteen-year-old daughter as he knows even before reading it that it will be a 'tiresome thing written by a woman who can think of nothing better to do with her very considerable talent than prolong a weary dialectic which presents the authorities as always evil and wrong and her magical-realist, lesbian, ethnic-minority self and assorted revolutionary company as always good and right and engaged, what's more, in a heroic battle where LIFE will one day triumph over the evils and violence of an uncomprehending establishment' (16). He identifies the book as 'a narrative version of a Benetton advertising campaign, *Hands Linked Around the World* […] all the while the company, as here the author, sorry authoress, was sensibly pocketing the cash that came with a higher moral profile' (123). In an interview with *3:AM Magazine* Parks explained that 'A lot of false literature around today is based on championing moral values that everybody already agrees with' (Destot). Jerry is scolding himself for his inability to share or at least tolerate his daughter's 'enthusiasm for what is in the end no worse than another kitsch expression of present-day orthodoxies' (Parks, *Europa* 124). He experiences similar feelings towards the film shown on the coach and collectively appreciated by the passengers except Jerry, the Hollywood film of *Dead Poets Society*. 'On six video screens speeding across a soon-to-be-united Europe a dozen of American college boys stand up on their chairs and then on their desk, and I can see […] how this wonderfully kitsch scene, where all enjoy feeling that

we are on the right side and revelling in our sentiments, is actually drawing tears from many an eye in our group' (91). Jerry comments not only the peculiarity of this American film's unanimous effect on this European bunch of people but also the fact that their job but not their profession is also education.

Jerry listens only to Handel or Mozart as he has been 'keeping very strict control' on his listening material since the love break-up. Consequently, he several times complains about the songs played on the coach (8). He remarks initially that 'many of the younger travellers are singing along (the way fresh recruiters, I believe, will sing along on their way to war)' (4). For Jerry 'people singing together all in the same state of mind' and all mass produced cultural products signify 'groups and tendency of groups have to operate at the level of the lowest, and perhaps not even common denominator, […] every individual is possessed by the spirit of the group, which is the very spirit apparently of *humanity,* and indeed of that *Europe*, come to think of it' (36). Trying to understand his daughter, Suzanne, who was empathizing with the much older Vikram's life troubles, and his own former blind confidence in his love affair and in his vocation Jerrry offers an explanation, which can be the gap between the generations, however, it is not only between the young and the older but Jerry seems to pass a line to middle age, achieving a deeper understanding of people's and his own motives. 'Suzanne's eagerness as she rushed forward to meet life, lapping up Griffiths' tragedies, like the students on the coach lapping up sad-love songs; myself euphoric, blind, stupidly philosophizing, stupidly quoting, wildly confident' (235-236). He reflects that people only invent these illusionary feelings in order to achieve 'an equilibrio' (237). 'It is from this collision of intimacy and distance […] that our collective dreams arise. Love affairs, families, Europe. We construct them in the dream of overcoming distances. We imagine we *have* overcome distances. Through these dreams. We *have* constructed something' (237). 'Where are the happily monogamous marriages, where the flourishing families, where Europe? To be invented […]' (239). Compagnon talks about the necessity of inventing Europe around the same time.

For Jerry the greatest means of this invention is language. When he, completely sceptical and unprepared, has to improvise a speech in front of the European Petition Committee he realises that 'one need only open one's mouth in

a public situation and the words will come. You will do what is asked of you. […] Orthodoxy is in the air. That is the truth. In the patterns of speech. The inertia of what you hear around you every day will take you through. Will write your speeches and your books' (220). This is also the book's final conclusion that through language one can invent one's life and even one's identity just as through that speech Jerry 'invented that unlikely image of a Jeremy Marlowe polemically engaged in the question of human rights' (239). This conclusion is especially disillusioning as it is set in parallel with real life tragedies. Before Jerry's speech the Committee was hearing an appeal for Bosnia and after Jerry's public success Vikram's suicide is discovered.

Public speech is also contrasted with the search for truth in Jerry's inner monologue impregnated with self-doubt and sarcasm turning on itself. Due to the book's international setting the problem of translation is also continuously present. Jerry observes that 'I remember everything in English in the end, films, books, horror stories, in that great dubbing process my mind must be' (210). However, as he observed earlier in relation to the dubbed version of *Dead Poets Society* thinking about dubbing and also about communication between nations that 'The words […] were one thing, but the gestures came from quite another language: two cultures indifferently superimposed for the convenience of apparent comprehension: the luxury of immediate entertainment' (75). While in his internal monologue Jerry uses only English, there are untranslated expressions appearing regularly in the text giving special significance and feeling to their meaning. Their exceptional role is also highlighted by their different printing in italics, which technique is also used in the case of some English expressions encouraging the reader to consider their compound sense.

The form of the novel with its long rambling sentences also mirrors the novel's multilayered character. The narrator's obsessive self-analysis and searching to understand his past and present parallel with the coach's continuous, unstoppable movement. This creates the feeling that events, past and present, are uncontrollably evolving towards a fateful end. The narrator's stream of consciousness is continuously moving on three levels. As Katherine A. Powers pointed out, 'Jerry's observation on the state of Europe resonates powerfully with his reflections on the history of his terrible love affair', moreover, the novel 'is not

only an excursion into the vast mindscape of jealousy with its rich veins of loss, anger and disgust, but also a sustained meditation on modern awfulness' (Powers).

While Jerry decides to join the trip because of *her*, whose name is never mentioned, he also discovers his travel companions' even more selfish, personal motives. As Adam Mars-Jones observed 'Jerry's life is a flailing disaster for the same reasons that the trip is a piece of cynical politicking and the European union a monument of wishful thinking and hidden interests' (Mars-Jones). *She* is using the trip to gather reflections 'for her research into a possible constitution for the *United Europe* which is part of a competition she has enrolled to win a *Euro scholarship* for a year's work and study in Brussels, [….] a move that she sees as the indispensable next step in her career, for she still thinks of life in terms of career and self-realisation, she is still at that stage' (Parks, *Europa* 20). The male teachers call the coach between themselves as '*The Shag Wagon'* referring to the statistics on the 'breakdown between the students, mostly girls and numerous, and the foreign teachers […] mostly men and few' (11). Thinking about Europe Parks also observed that 'nations joined Europe, not as converts to an exciting ideology, but as realists negotiating surrender. Convinced that a separate national destiny was an outdated delirium, they nevertheless hung on to whatever shreds of sovereignty they could. While the rhetoric spoke of equals pooling their destiny, decisions evidently emerged from the shifting antagonism and alliances between France, Germany and Britain' (Parks, 'Europe needs').

If we consider *Europa*'s complex system of allusions, not unlike Aldiss's, it is not insignificant that the love triangle that sets the British narrator on this journey is formed among him, *her* 'with her very French laugh' and 'handsome Georg, a German of Polish extraction' (Parks, *Europa* 22, 13). Her Frenchness is emphasised many times being founded on stereotypes, such as her French laugh, perfumed smell and elaborate feminine appearance. Rivalries and jealousy seem to trouble the characters just as much as Europe. The lovers have a passionate love affair while betraying each other - Jerry his Italian wife and she first her husband then Jerry - and then physically hurting each other and starting a war and hostility. Araine Chebel d'Appollina points out that 'the basic paradox of European nationalism is that it is fed by the memory of events that is divided and bloodied,

rather than united Europe' (Chebel d'Appollina 178-179). The possibility of true reconciliation is questioned from the very beginning when contemplating on his false belief that he has been 'cured' of this fateful love Jerry recalls that not long ago in his newly required small flat he was saying to himself referring to William Blake's proverb 'Yes, the road to excess – and I would quote to myself with a cheerful complacence that is embarrassing to recall, […] truly does lead to the Palace of Wisdom. Though one might have quibbled over the word 'palace', I suppose' (8). Here Jerry sarcastically refers to this own abode but it can also invoke the image of Europe.

Jerry, philosophising on *her* attraction to Georg, comes to a possible reason among many given by him that '[s]he fell in love with that Germanic authority, that smooth Teutonic wisdom, the charmingly formal gestures, the simple assiduousness, the flowers delivered by a reputable company' (53). She, however, gives the cause as 'she only did it two or three times out of *varie sympathie*' due to his relationship with his bedridden wife suffering from multiple sclerosis, as 'The mother of his child was so ill, poor thing, and he is heroic to stay with her' (160). While one cannot help thinking of the relationship between West and East Germany, she is puzzled over Jerry's devastation questioning him that how he could 'care so much *about a fuck or two*' and she explained that 'There was a way in which English were still barbarians […] No wonder they had trouble with Europe. They lacked the subtlety Catholic cultures had. They lacked the flexibility. […] The spirit of compromise […] of *negotiable identity*' (160). She identified Jerry's problem as his

> mulish Anglo-Saxon Protestant absolutism, extremism, so mulishly absolute and so extreme that I was atheist without my atheism bringing me the slightest of benefits, so absolute and extreme that I attached such ludicrous pluses and minuses to words like *sincerity* and *hypocrisy*, not understanding that those two ideas were never truly incarnate but in constant negotiation, a fusion you could never separate out, and if only I would loosen up and become more *European* and appreciate that while it is important, supremely important, to have values and ideas, it was a halfwit's mistake to insist anybody live by them […].(46-47)

As Delanty pointed out ‘as a result of globalisation, multiculturalism, global civil society and cosmopolitan political and cultural currents, societies are becoming more and more pluralised and interpenetrating and less and less discrete wholes anchored in unique cultures and traditional nation-states’ the consequence of which is that national identities are becoming more ‘decentred, liquid and reflexive in their awareness of their limits’, that they exist ‘in a state of flux and contingency’ (Delanty, ‘Is There’ 78).

In the novel there is, however, another English character, who counterpoints Jerry: Colin from Birmingham, the second largest but overlooked city in Britain, who is depicted as an easy-going and harmless womaniser with ‘his Brummie swagger’ and rude jokes (Parks, *Europa* 51). Jerry sees him as the symbol of ex-pats as ‘[h]e hams his Brummie accent, […] the way so many ex-pats ham their lost-identity. The moustache is a pose. Yes, he hams this unpredictable matey belligerence, this curiously Midlands attitude. Colin is home away from home’ (50). The minor characters also project national stereotypes both in their personal lives and in their relationship with each other, even if with the usual sarcastic overtone of Parks. The Irish Barnaby Hilson is loathed by the Welsh Vikram ‘in part because Hilson usurps his, Vikram’s, role of a *charismatic figure from much-loved ethnic-minority culture* and in part because Hilson has a serious project in life and gets on with it, working hard in the mornings and pursuing an entirely stable and sensible private life with his rather older English wife, who is commendably jovial and practical’ (150). While Vikram with his mixed ethnicity, two divorces, a troubled past and present, a child-custody case and having as a true companion only his ugly mongrel named after the Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwylym represents a more problematic national identity. Jerry observes that there is not a Welsh flag among the flags arranged in front of the European Parliament’s entrance ‘in the random abstraction of alphabetical order’ in order not to cause ‘offence’, ‘for of course Wales does not constitute a nation state’ and so referring to Vikram ‘he wasn’t properly represented, didn’t even turn up, as the Scottish and Irish did, as decorative elements, trophies really, within the British flag, the Union Jack, which anyway Europeans notoriously refer to as English’ (190, 192).

David Gates, the American novelist, in his crushing review of *Europa*, depicts the female protagonist as ‘for Marlow, the quixotic defender of boundaries

(whether political, intellectual, interpersonal or sexual), she's a wet dream. For the reader, though, she's a cipher. We get the sinking feeling that she's somehow to be identified with the mythic Europa - - there's no other visible reason for the title - - presumably because she has a complex of supposedly "European" attributes: sexuality, intellectuality, moral fluidity' (Gates). On the one hand, her Frenchness is emphasised many times being founded on stereotypes, such as her French laugh, smell and appearance. On the other hand, her enthusiasm towards Europe supports the allusion between her and the continent. '*She* was proud of being French, she said, because the French revolution lay at the heart of modern Europe. The principles of *liberté, fraternité, égalité* had transcended national borders and become the rights of every man, and finally the principles upon which the whole of Europe was built' (Parks, *Europa* 137). Gates entitled his review 'It's Academic' and condemned Parks for self-indulgence and the novel that is 'set on the Continent' and 'depicts love among the highbrows' as 'amateur stuff' (Gates). He finds the character of 'Marlow's beloved, a Frenchwoman who combines naughty expertise in the boudoir (but of course!) with high-end pedantry' especially difficult to 'swallow' (Gates). To illustrate his judgement he quotes the following passage of the book. 'So we read Chateaubriand and Benjamin Constant and the Duchesse d'Abrantes and Michelet, which had been her special area of study, and we read Xenophon and Thucydides and Plato and Aristophanes, which had been my area of study, and we discussed them together, usually after making love' (Parks, *Europa* 137). This sentence might sound especially pretentious but their areas of study is also significant as the Greek philosophers symbolising the theoretical idealistic foundation of Europe and the writers connected to the French Revolution can be seen as the representatives of the harsh reality. In the novel this duality of ideas and reality is continuously present as the inner monologue and literary reflections are intermingled with the descriptive and detailed pictures of love-making and attending body functions. Jerry discovers her unfaithfulness through a misquote of his words and so through literature. What he finds especially hurtful is that their special moments and thoughts are at the same time forgotten and recycled. Jerry's reflections of her spiritual betrayal are accompanied by his physical aggression towards her as he repeatedly hits her. This physical brutality is also expressed in his linguistic crudity, sarcasm and disillusionment in his internal

monologue, which immediately counterpoints any elitism. The dilemma between independence and fusion, between power and submission, in addition to the issues of gender and national identity can be observed both on the level of the individual and symbolically on the level of European nations.

The parallel and intermingled nature of the character and destiny of Jerry, his ex-love and of Europe is also apparent in Jerry's explanation why he never says '*her* name', although he thinks 'little else but her' (28). It

> is partly because that name is still so powerful that its very articulation causes an emotional seizure, an immediate tension that I feel physically, but also perhaps more importantly, because by never saying it I keep it that way I prolong its power, I prevent its dilution in repetition, the way a world like *Europe* has been diluted into thin air with all the times everybody says *Europe* this and *Euro* that, though once it was the name of a girl a god became a bull to rape and half the heroes hoped to find. (Parks, *Europa* 28-29)

Jerry's usage of the expression "rape" to replace the more common interpretation of "seduction" not only refers to his violent behaviour towards *her* but also to Jerry's feelings about Europe. The abuse and loss of a beautiful dream and the relentless search in order to make amends or just sense of it is a recurrent motif in all the discussed works.

The allusion between *her* and the mythical girl called *Europa* is further strengthened by the book's title and the fact that the cover of the English version but also of its translated publications depicts the image of a girl.[47] Her name is revealed only in the last sentences of the book when Jerry decides to embark on a new relationship and a new life with the help of 'the Welsh MEP's Yorkshire secretary tottie[48]', whose name he has forgotten (260). With the hope of his that

[47] The English edition is a photographic image of half of a female face, the German translation's cover shows the torso of a naked lady from the back, while on the French version a photo of a statue of Europa can be seen.

[48] The expression "tottie" is invented by Colin, with whom Jerry spends evenings discussing their most recent conquests and they 'refer to them by some easily distinguishable characteristic, as for example where they live or what they do or what they're like, so that they might be called Bolognia-tottie, for example, or Opera-tottie, […] because it is forbidden to mention their names, since this would suggest involvement and respect, which are taboo for those of us who have decided that boorishness is our only hope' (Parks, *Europa* 44). While the young Italian female students are customarily referred to as different totties by Jerry, he also frequently slips and uses their real names. This denaming process is also paralleled with his inability to pronounce her name and the fact that the reader never learns the name of his wife, whom he has left, as he always mentions her with the expression 'my wife'.

her name will not be the same as *hers* the novel finishes. 'Not Christine again, I hope. Not Christine' (261). Her character might also symbolise Christianity, another defining value of Europe and a reference to the divided nature of Christianity can be observed in her puzzlement over Jerry's devastation due to her unfaithfulness. The Hebrew origin of the name Christ, of which Christine is the derivative, also provides another layer of interpretation. It means 'Messiah', which in turns refers to 'someone who is worshiped; someone who saves or delivers others' (Delahunty).

She wants to have with Jerry 'a fresh and intellectual relationship' for her 'after the years of tedium and near-moronic materialism with her picture-frame-entrepreneur husband' and for him to regain his self-esteem, and his 'sense of *being someone going somewhere*' (Parks, *Europa* 137). This search for calling is again paralleled with the meaning of Europe as Jerry observes:

> she was always making me read books in the hope that I might recover my vocation, might truly become that person, that man (this was important), I had once shown promise of becoming […] then the first mention of Europe as a geographical entity (was it Theocritus?) referred only to the Peloponnese, and only in order to *distinguish* the Peloponnese from Asia, only in order to demonstrate that the small peninsula had *not* been swallowed up into the amorphous mass of an ever-invasive Asia. Or so I recall, rightly, or perhaps wrongly, from a book she made me read, re-read, in her insistent and one must suppose laudable attempt to have me recover my vocation, to have me become, perhaps this was the nub, somebody she could respect. It was a claim to distinction, Europe, I recall. (Parks, *Europa* 12-13)

Parks here further emphasises the significance of gender roles: in Jerry's case to become a man of distinction, for *her* as Europa to support his vocation. The representation of Asia as the distinctively different 'Other' without any characteristic visible for the European eye but its threatening and invasive nature echoes the ideas behind the concept of "fortress Europe".

Although Parks talking about the European Union stated that due to 'scared threats from outside we had to form a solid block in collective defence against agricultural products from Africa, industrial manufacturers from China and the growth of Russia's empire to the East', he feels that a lack of vocation might be the Union's problem (Parks, 'Europe'). 'Perhaps we in Europe today are European to

the extent to which we desire to feel European and cannot. We cannot be enthusiastic. We know that our Community was built as a last resort, from the ashes of what was more than just another war, from too much knowledge. Unlike the United States of America, our project has no dionysiac spirit behind it, no fundamentalism' (Parks 'Europe'). The finding of the vocation of the main characters in all of Parks's novels parallels with the need for Europe to find a greater calling that might give shape and justifies for good its future and future actions (Parks, Europe'). Although with Parks's customary subtle irony the past and so the past vocations are always questioned, debated and cast away as illusionary ones, the reader also learns about the great determination and enthusiasm the characters have until the very moment been pursuing these ideals:

> […] this is what all of us long for, is it not, to be engaged in a drama where we know what we're doing, and are quite sure we are in the right and can feel a strong sense of purpose and identity and self-esteem and heroism even. How else explain […] all the religious crusades and wars pursued up to and far beyond madness, the environmental madness and concern for animal welfare, not to mention all the novels about the same? How else explain this enthusiasm for Europe? (Parks, *Europa* 40)

Parks observes in his essay 'Destiny' that '[a]ll recent developments – social development – in the West has been worthily directed toward 'increasing individual choice' giving us 'control over our lives' reducing the incidence of imposed destiny' (Parks, 'Destiny' 135). However, Parks questions whether it is a positive development as in the contemporary world 'one must choose one's happiness every day: choose where one lives, choose one's wife, choose whether the children go to state school or private; a world where no social scaffolding can disguise the fact that one's destiny is simply this chameleon stranger' (139).

When talking about Europe the expressions vocation and especially "destiny" are overly used. As José Manuel Durão Barroso, ex-President of the European Commission in the Nobel Lecture, emphasised, '[p]eace cannot rest only on the good will of man. It needs to be grounded on a body of laws, on common interests and on a deeper sense of a common community of destiny' (Barroso). Or in his article Jürgen Habermas analysing the European crisis in 2010 offered a

solution that '[w]ith a modicum of political pluck, the crisis of the single currency may yet achieve what some once hoped from a common European foreign policy: a consciousness, reaching beyond national borders, that we share a common European fate' (Habermas). Tony Blair seemed to represent an approach when one's destiny is the matter of choice. In his article published in January 2013 arguing against Brexit he pointed out that 'the rationale for the European Union today is stronger, not weaker, than it was 66 years ago, when the project began. But it is different. Back then, the rationale was peace; today it is power.' (Blair) He admitted that 'Europe is a destiny that Britain will never embrace easily. But doing so is absolutely essential to remaining a world power, politically and economically' (Blair). The list can be continued endlessly and it can be seen that 'the European destiny' is a difficult notion as it has been from the very beginning. As Max Haller observed, '[w]e cannot say that the European Union "realises" a century-old dream of Europe, simply because there was no coherent, single dream of this sort. Rather, we must say that the makers of the EU use the intellectual ideas about "Europe" to justify and legitimate their own political ambitions' (Haller 264). It is not only the idea of "European destiny" that is so difficult to identify but as it is presented in Parks's other novel, *Destiny* and in all the discussed books the notion of destiny itself raises many questions.

Parks proposes the questions that '[i]f living means being in thrall to the enchantment of the possible – 'where there's life, there's hope' – then a sense of destiny will presumably involve surrender to the only possible, an acceptance of mortality: this is my own life, my own adventure, the one woman between myself and death. But should we be obliged to *choose* our destiny, rather merely grasping a sense of it after all is settled? Or rather, if we choose it, was it really destiny? Or just a mistake?' (Parks, 'Destiny' 134). The question of choice, destiny or mistake is what troubles the main character, Burton, in Parks's novel *Destiny* which starts 'Some three months after returning to England, and having at last completed […] that collection of material that, once assembled in a book, must serve to transform a respectable career into a monument – something so comprehensive and final, this was my plan, as to be utterly irrefutable – I received […] the phone-call that informed me of my son's suicide' (Parks, *Destiny* 1). Parks himself explained the structure of the starting sentence of the novel as '[t]he whole writing procedure is

on the one hand a gesture of control like the opening sentence when you've got an incredible monumental sentence, and then at the end the sentence destroyed by the suicide of the child. So you constantly have got this syntactical elaboration, which is almost pompous, wilfully determined to impose the mind on the material. And then the mind begins to just break down because other thoughts just reject this syntactical knack' (Parks, in Destot).

Having learnt the death of his only son, Marco, who also symbolises the physical continuity for Burton as his other child, Paula, is an adopted daughter Burton tries to explain it and find the past and present meaning of the events and his actions. Stephen Mitchelmore pointed out that 'Burton becomes, at this point if not before, a reader of his life. All action is kindled in the mind. For us, rather than being insulated from the impact of the news, […] we become Burton's fellow readers, living in his uncertain present, trying to understand what it all means' (Mitchelmore). Burton cannot help making connections between the incidents of his life since as Parks explains the essence of making connection is that it is 'the mind's obsession with controlling the world it finds and represents around itself. If I can make a series of connections between all these things, I satisfy myself that in some ways my mind has been extended around the world and I can feel satisfied even if the world is not what I want it to be' (Parks, in Destot). This rather masculine notion of power and control, and the anxiety over the loss of it seems to colour also the thinking of Aldiss's and Végel's male characters. Burton, however, himself realises that this process is illusory as he states 'the mind is ever seduced by easy analogy' (Parks, *Destiny* 93). And he experiences 'the ultimate loss of control: instead of the mind extending a satisfactory web over the world, the world itself begins to look like something that's taking control of me, like these connections are making themselves' (Parks, in Destot).

Parks not only questions the possibility of creating a meaningful history of the past events but also shows the possibility of present choices illusory. 'Decision is obviously this whole Western thing about control. I reflect on the possibilities and then I make a decision, but in fact you do not do that. You just get to the point when you suddenly find yourself doing something […] So what's happening then is that you get a febrile mind constantly going through a series of things which might allow it to find a way out of the impasse it is in' (Parks, in Destot). This is what is

happening not only with Burton in *Destiny* but also with Jerry in *Europa*. As Parks points out, their internal monologues are not a stream-of-consciousness in the traditional sense, which for Parks is 'basically a poetic attempt to mix the voice of the mind with the mind's perceptions of the phenomena around it' (Parks, in Destot). In the two novels 'the outside environment feeds into' the characters' inner reasonings 'only as a constant reminder of things that it's engaged in anyway' (Parks, in Destot). While his mental search never ceases, Burton regularly has gaps in his memory of real life happenings, even of his own actions. Parks follows Beckett's footsteps in the belief in the impossibility of all language to 'actually describe the world' (Parks, in Destot). 'That sense of being nearly there, but not being there. […] It's always distant from reality, and literature would better draw attention to that, and not pretend that language can evoke reality. […] it shows suffering and also snatches you away from it, because the good thing about language is precisely that it's euphemistic' (Destot).

Burton suspects that the clue to his son's schizophrenia, '[t]o what went wrong.' might be '[t]his language thing' (Parks, *Destiny* 137) The connection between language and schizophrenia (and destiny) is also investigated by Kertész and Végel. Looking at his son's body 'in the *camera ardente*' Burton contemplates that '[w]hen Marco spoke English, I thought he was English, he thought of himself as English and was acknowledged to be so. […] Likewise when he spoke Italian. I looked at his pale lips. Is that the clue? Two entirely different thought patterns […]' (138). Burton's Italian wife, Marco's mother, never learnt to speak English as she found it 'hostile' to her spirit (137). During his long discussions with Marco's psychiatrist Burton tries to explain to the doctor that '[t]hings you know in Italian […] you'll never know in English. Things you become in English that you'll never become in Italian. Two different ways of telling yourself about yourself […] Was language the beginning of the schismatic process?' (138). The psychiatrist, however, dismissed the idea stating that '[h]alf the world is bilingual […] with no adverse effects', which is immediately commented on by Burton as '[h]e is a psychiatrist, not a shrink' (138). This comment becomes significant as Parks believes that schizophrenia is a disease 'which they want to be organic and which they treat with sophisticated tranquilizers, to just dump out the connection-making parts of the brain […]' (Parks, in Destot). Parks is interested in the 'Western world's

anxiety' about it as he suggests that there is an underlining reason behind this attitude as '[t]hat means nobody ever has to change their pattern of behaviour, but it also means that the drug companies can make a lot of money selling drugs' (Parks, in Destot). He, however, is convinced that '[t]he individual exists in a kind of delicate ecology of relationships with those immediately close to him, and then with the society at large, and then with the language that he's thinking in, which is the expression of the society at large, and depending on his integration in that will depend his mental health' (Destot)

Parks also emphasises the importance of language as forming one's destiny since 'each language is a mind frame and suggests again a certain lack of individualism. You didn't choose the language that framed your mind. You're not independent of these matters' (Parks, in Destot). In *Destiny* Burton regularly compares Marco's situation to his daughter's case. Paola was adopted when she was two years old from a Ukrainian orphanage. Talking to his dead son Burton remembers that '[y]ou know, I can't remember Paola's Ukrainian name. I was frequently away. I felt your mother was right to rename her at once. To make her ours, to make her Italian. […] We couldn't have sent Paola to an English school. She was so far behind, so slow. It seemed the right thing to make her a hundred per cent Italian to give her a feeling of belonging somewhere' (Parks, *Destiny* 146). Parks describes his own situation having lived and worked as a translator in Italy for over twenty years and compares it with his children's, who were born and are raised in Italy as '[f]or them the world is Italian, that is their mental construct, and for them, certain words will have a frisson and a deep relationship with phenomena, which they can't have for me. For me, it's just another thing that was being superimposed over reality at a time when all those profound things had already been established' (Parks, in Destot).

Despite Burton's realisation of language's inadequacy, the seductive nature of allusions and his real life troubles, he cannot give up his pursuit of his vocation to finish the book on Italian national characteristics. After being a successful and respected journalist in whole life Burton realizes that he has lost the desire 'to find the urgent words journalism must daily find to feed the world's insatiable appetite for drama and schadenfreude' and becomes obsessive about understanding 'the entirely contradictory motions of the spirit: sublimity, bureaucracy…. How it was

possible for the mind to entertain such paradox' (Parks, *Destiny* 93). Although this question of '[t]he sublime and the nit-picking' leads back to Jerry's main problem concerning both his love and the European Union, Burton believes it to be a particularly Italian characteristic (93).

Geoff Nicholson, a British novelist, observed that while the narrator-protagonist writes his 'magnum opus' about 'national character and the predictability of human behaviour', his wife 'is many ways "typically" Italian. Their fights go along the lines of 'You're so cold and English, she said […] You're so fake and hysterical, I replied' (Nicholson). Nicholson himself took on a stereotypical analysis as it can be seen in the title he gave to his review 'Divorce, Italian Style' and the tagline 'Tim Parks' novel charts the disintegration of a Briton living abroad' (Nicholson). One of his main criticisms of the novel is that '[o]ne is also at loss to know whether Burton's putative masterwork is to be taken seriously. No doubt there is a nonfiction book to be written about nationality and destiny (Tim Parks appears to have written several of them), but Burton's musings are feeble and pretentious, and he seems to be interested only in the Italians and the English' (Nicholson). This criticism is quite curious as Burton always emphasises that he is writing the book on the Italians only albeit from an English viewpoint. It is, however, still significant that Nicholson also uses the pair of nationality and destiny despite the fact that Burton himself never openly connects these two phrases. Nicholson's final conclusion is that '[i]f we really want to think about nationality and destiny, it's worth saying that this seems a very European book rather than an English or American one. The internalization of the narrative, the plotlessness and the absence of graphic sex and violence are refreshingly alien' (Nicholson). To counter this dubious praise he immediately compares the novel with Kingsley Amis's *Stanley and the Women*, ('another novel that involves a father and a schizophrenic son'), which is, according to him, 'simultaneously lighter and more profound than this one' (Nicholson). He also adds that the possible reason for that is that Amis's novel 'seems considerably more "English"' so it might be 'so much more appealing' to an English reviewer (Nicholson).

Burton's character describes a more fluid nationality complaining that 'I was always being mistaken for what I was not, German in Italy, American in England', just as Parks depicts a more complex nationality in his blog entry on the webpage

of the *New York Review of Books* where he is dealing with the question 'To what community does a writer belong today?' in an era of globalization (Parks, *Destiny* 136; Parks, 'Are').

> I am known in England mainly for light, though hopefully thoughtful, non-fiction; in Italy for polemical newspaper articles and a controversial book about soccer; in Germany, Holland, France, for what I consider my "serious" novels *Europa*, *Destiny*, *Cleaver*; in the USA for literary criticism; and in a smattering of other countries, but also in various academic communities for my translations and writing on translation.[…] Frequently readers get my nationality wrong. They don't seem to know where I'm coming from or headed to. (Parks, 'Are')

The reasons for acquiring so many different roles in so many places, as he plainly states, are 'chance, modern communication, and an urgent need to earn money' (Parks, 'Are'). While globalization should mean 'drawing more and more people into a single community where readers all over the world read the same authors' his experience is different. While in England, he felt he was 'Mr Italy' with autobiographical books on his resident country, as it made sense that 'their ilk' is 'decoding another country', this reputation didn't 'attract the Germans, Dutch, and French who seemed to feel that serious novel writing was not compatible with this kind of ironic anthropology' (Parks, 'Are').

Parks describing the reception of *Destiny* and *Europa* in Germany, where his novels 'were outselling English editions by many times', he observes that the critics invited him

> to intensely earnest debates on Europe and fiction, and in general everybody felt it would be unwise to insist too much on this other material. I was now quite different people in England, Germany, and Italy, where I had begun to write articles in Italian on Italian issues for Italians, without the framing and contextualizing needed when talking about such matters to those who don't know the country. (Parks, 'Are')

Working also as an essayist for *The New York Review of Books* he considers the issue of the different audiences and the languages necessary to address them the greatest consequence of his fragmented nationality as a writer.

> Inevitably, as one addresses different communities of readers in different countries one tends to write differently for them, not necessarily to please, but just to be in a meaningful relation to them. […] You realize you are many writers, potentially very many, and the way your talents develop will depend on the way different communities in different countries respond to you. (Parks, 'Are')

So different from the independent, autonomous writer image Parks not only questions the possibility of writing to the world as a global human audience, but also draws attention to the fact that the writer's talents and writing are also greatly influenced by the audiences' response.

While inviting other writers' contribution to the blog he admits that his experience is

> in sharp contrast with the rhetoric that surrounds creative writing today. If asked, most writers will say they write only for themselves and are not aware of, let alone swayed by an audience. An ideal notion of globalization, then, posits this sovereign individual, who enjoys a consistent and absolute identity, above any contamination from those who buy his work, selling the product of his or her genius to a world that is able to receive it and enjoy it in the same way everywhere. So individualism and globalization go hand in glove. The idea that we are absolutely free of any community permits us to engage with all people everywhere. This is why so much international literature is about freedom and favours rebellions against institutions. (Parks, 'Are')

Parks even suspects that 'it is precisely in positing themselves as outside community, influenced by the collective, that writers are in fact accepting to fill a part that the modern community has dreamt up for them: the one who allows us all to believe that freedom and absolute identity outside the community are possible' (Parks, 'Are').

Jerry in *Europa*, Burton in *Destiny*, as Cleaver in Parks' later novel *Cleaver*, are all middle-aged writers-to-be looking for 'the will to create permanence, to make one's destiny more than a transient destination' (Shafer). Parks describes the problem from the writer's point of view that

> [i]n the nineteenth-century story, even if things go wrong, there is still a basic Christian underpinning that says the good will be dealt with attractively in the world beyond. It's clear that once that has gone – and

> we lost long ago the whole kind of heroic feeling of Greek literature, the splendour of the gesture against destiny – it's really very difficult to create the end of a book in such a way that somebody cannot just feel destroyed by it, this is the problem for writers like Beckett or Bernhardt, or for any really serious writer. (Parks, in Destrot and Gallix)

Parks claims that one way around it is 'to pretend that you are writing about outrages that can be corrected', which he despises, but the other way is to 'approach catharsis through exhaustion' (Parks, in Destrot and Gallix). Gábor Németh, who is around the same age as Parks, feels in a similar vein that 'the great metaphysical gestures that were performed by the co-called Grand Art can be presently perceived only ironically; only their reflection has remained' (Németh, in Alinda). The world-founding role that great works used to be capable of playing seems to have passed into history. The genres easily fossilize and turn into clichés and art has lost that ancient function that was valid, for example, in the case of the paintings in the Altamira Caves, when people believed that representation does influence reality, that it is a mythical action with which the future can be altered. (Németh, in Alinda). Németh sees literature in a constant battle for regaining its former force of expression (Németh, in Alinda).

Chapter 7

Migration

The narrator in Gábor Németh's book *A tejszínről* (About Cream) (2007) recalls his childhood impressions of Europe and poses the childish questions: [i]f Europe is Western- Europe, Eastern- Europe is the Russian, who are we. Where do I live', but with the indicative mood signifies that no answer is hoped for this rhetorical question; this condition is accepted with a resignation so familiar in East-Central Europe (Németh, *A tejszínről* 37). 'What Central Europe means has shifted with shifting borders and rules', 'it is always at risk of being the product of someone's imagination', wrote Tony Judt in 1990 (Judt 23). During its history, as Horel emphasises, Central-Europe 'is very rarely an active participant in the matches of the world-powers making decisions on its behalf; this was the situation around 1848, in 1918, between the two World Wars and in 1945' (Horel 19). Every nation of Central Europe 'almost flaunts the fact that it is the victim of the powers' mongering' and important factors of its national identity include a sense of martyrdom, of ill-fortune, and of national tragedy, and the angst about the annihilation of the nation and its state (17). She also points out that while for these nations possessing an often negative national identity and self-representation both West and East sometimes present attraction and sometimes repulsion, at the same time they strongly feel they belong to the Europe constituted by the Western part (15-16).

Gábor Németh, born in 1956, grew up in the height of communism and experienced the political changes as a young adult. His book *A tejszínről* (About Cream) is a collection of prose works that are 'small islands in the sea of not writing' just like the clouds of whipped cream are floating on the surface of a cup of coffee (Németh, *A tejszínről* Blurb). The world cannot be described as a whole, only as fragments, images, as the narrator describes, 'all we can do is to hoard nicely together everything that we can remember' (175). Schein observes that Németh 'thinks through the problem of perception and remembrance in the duality of communication and its inability, in other words, he starts off from the images'

existence that is full of personality and persisting outside the book' (Schein 386). The narrator remarks that

> [w]hen I am writing, I sometimes see images, and I try to make them stay. The internal images cannot be communicated, you, who are reading, will never see what I see, however hard am I attempting to create the most suggestive and exact description, the "you" and the "I" are trying to place together their own images based on their individual memories, and in turn, words remind and not present, this is probably the most significant resignation you are sentenced to. (Németh, *A tejszínről* 10)

The narrator describes the images of Europe formed in a child living in communist Hungary. In the child's (and the people's) imagination Europe becomes the land of magic and the abyss separating the dreamland and his homeland is like the gap between tales and reality.

> The Eiffel Tower, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Collosseum, the Tower of London, The Arch of Triumph in Paris.
> Pictures on my mother's silk scarf.
> Europe – colourful pictures on page something. Bananas grow in Europe and it is there where oranges ripen and also Swiss chocolate, my father, when he goes there, always picks one from the chocolate tree. (Németh, *A tejszínről* 37)

These images alter when describing the situation after the political changes when the Iron Curtain was lifted and the borders could be crossed. 'Then you get out, of course, and after a while almost whenever you want. Only you want it rarely, as you do not have money even for an ice-cream' (40). Németh masterfully catches the scene that summarises the overall shock and craze of East-Central Europeans when finally facing in reality the untold riches of the West.

> A crown made of light over West Berlin.
> All kinds of fruit yoghurt.
> You are watching your friend, who is sitting on the kitchen tiles, at two in the morning, in the glow of the fridge, drunk by fruit yoghurt.
> […]
> I am visiting all the department stores. (Németh, *A tejszínről* 40-41)

There is, however, more at stake than the mere economic differences, the cultural division separating the two sides, strengthened by the decades of the Cold War, quickly becomes apparent.

> What is a question of life and death in Hungary here it is already just a game.
> […] I have realised that the spirit is just a design.
> You can buy it in the shops, you are just looking a little bit, then you put it into your shopping basket, you pay for it and take it home. (Németh, *A tejszínről* 40-41)

Zsidó vagy? (Are You A Jew?) (2004) takes the problematics in the impossibility of narration further. Németh explained the novel first sentence 'I have to start everything from the beginning' as he felt that he was slowly getting deprived of everything because he did not want to talk in the old voices any more (Németh, in Károlyi 75). 'To dance again the ballet of stylization: That speaking should be started afresh' (75). He tried to find the voice that sounds inside him despite the knowledge that it is impossible as inevitably 'everything becomes a style' (75). The title indicates the question of which the narrator attempts to make sense and provide an answer for. However, as Németh commented, the book was aimed to eliminate the question which awakens provocative memories in Hungary and to draw attention to its impossibility (Németh, in Várnai). Németh eliminates the question by its relentless investigation, by ceaselessly returning to it, scrupulously examining it from countless perspectives, by analysing any connected life events. Kertész, Aldiss, Végel, and Parks are all using the repetitive return to certain concepts and problems until sheer exhaustion reveals its impossibility. As Parks phrased, "catharsis though exhaustion".

The impossibilities of the title question echo Kertész's interpretation of Kafka's impossibilities. On the one hand, Németh refers to the impossibility of definition since, as the writer observed, 'it can be approached from the perspectives of ethnicity, sociology, religion or culture but none of them works completely. Only your whole life can give an answer to the question whether you are a Jew' (Németh, in Várnai). For his narrator and the writer himself, neither of whom possess any of the above mentioned Jewish identification aspects, being a Jew is an existential question. Németh stated that the 'are you a Jew' question is

impossible, on the other hand, since he is a Jew only in the sense that he considered himself as one in the most sensitive period of his life. He lived through its inherent conflicts and he recognised himself in its Otherness (Németh, in Várnai). Németh is the successor of Kertész in gaining this recognition by the means of the Holocaust, although in the much younger writer's case only through its memory and its mental imprint in the Hungarian society.

In the novel the narrator as a child in a typical communist summer camp is taken to the open-air cinema where by accident the children are shown an unedited footage on the liberation of a concentration camp. The child narrator cannot but identify with the victims and is faced with the question why he has not been told about his Jewishness and when his and his family's turn will come. The narrator remembers it did not come up concerning the unshown persecutors 'whether those *people* will be in the right' (Németh, *Zsidó* 47). 'Whether they will have a just cause. Since the real reason is already established. They have the word '*Jew*'. In an unknown language it means *guilty*. It was crystal clear that we are guilty. That we have committed something unredeemable' (47). This can be the only sensible reason for the punishment and the shameful silence surrounding the topic. This innocent sense of wonder later becomes a quest to make sense of the functioning of the post-56 Hungarian society. The narration follows the associative line of life experiences circling around the title question, which through its endless repetition, as György C. Kálmán observed, 'appears occasionally meaningful and deep, at other times crucially vital, while sometimes ridiculous and seems as foolish automatism' (Kálmán) The question

> reveals countless shades (and their opposing sides): it springs from learning about the horror in childhood; it is formulated in the milieu of community, friendship, love relationships and family as a signifier of the longing to belong; it sparks the clarification of the feelings towards the homeland; one can be interpreted as the dilemma between concealment and disclosure; it can be seen as the hidden reason behind every trauma. (Kálmán)

Zsidó vagy? (Are You a Jew?) is not a novel about whether the narrator or even the reader has a Jewish origin but instead invokes the figure of the wandering Jew and investigates the unavoidable curse and inherent blessing of being a

nomad (Braidotti), a free spirit (Nietzsche) or a true cosmopolitan (Gagnier). This is why Németh believes that '[o]nly your whole life can give an answer to the question whether you are a Jew' (Németh in Várnai). Already as a child the narrator realises that for him it is impossible to follow the accepted but meaningless norms although he cannot explain his inability. 'Why am I incapable of doing what is so easy for others, easy and functioning, you do not even have to figure out something new. Why can't I mimic them?' (Németh, *Zsidó* 45). He becomes 'an observer, instead of a participant' and when, as he comments, 'they are occasionally compelling me to take part', 'I do so out of politeness, but in order to make it bearable, I crawl out of myself, I move a little bit away, and later I pull myself up onto something, onto a suitable place, I look for a suitable point, from where I can see over the whole' (20-21). This self-isolation, however, does not provide an escape from reality but brings with it a permanent suspicion. A suspicion based on the conviction that, at least in Hungarian society, 'everything is senseless, senseless and useless, and from this infinite senselessness and uselessness you have to mine out the unthinkably minute sensible and useful bits without forgetting even for a minute that at the same time obviously you are mistaken in the, one might say, majority of cases' (31). This vigilance towards the world, this inability to stop observing and analysing, this continuous retreat and search for escape naturally lead to finding rest only in movement, finding home only on the road, becoming a "wandering Jew".

'It is here where I am departing, from, East, West, somewhere else is best. You go elsewhere, and you get delighted, shamefully and disproportionately, if they mistake you for something else. Let me be mistaken for English or Spanish. Let me be Spanish' (145). The adult narrator embarks on an associative ironic trip around Europe trying on the stereotypical lives of different nations and concludes that the source of his happiness would not come from having another nationality but derive from merely not being Hungarian. 'I do not hate my country at all. I am only physically sick of it', states the narrator who is 'Hungarian in his every inch, in his past, present' and future. (143) (Kálmán). His love and care for his homeland radiates through all the bitterness of the narration, which is built on linguistic humour, witty hints and world plays, the majority of which is understandable only in Hungarian. The narrated public events, personal stories, the narrator's subjective

experiences and reflections are all imbedded in the country's past and present history, social and cultural life. Végel's "stateless local patriot" and Lewycka's "worthy immigrants" expressing strong bonds towards their home of origin echoes the place attachment expressed in and through Németh's prose. The question arises whether there is a link between true cosmopolitanism and intense local connections.

Németh's book illustrates how the same environment, experiences, influences can lead to, on the one hand, a narrow patriotism, hatred towards and fear of the Other, on the other hand, to a free, fearless, cosmopolitan spirit. In Hungary, where two of the most often used offensive terms are 'smelly Jew' and faggoty gypsy', the narrator imagines that 'there would be a boy travelling, by the underground, and somebody would be offensively disparaged by being called a Jew, and the boy would suggest it be stopped, when the bullies would ask him, *why, fuckyeah, are you a Jew?*. The boy would not be too strong but he would still respond, *for you, yes*. A strong answer, stronger than the boy, the only possible answer, so appropriate that he is immediately stabbed for it' (Németh, *Zsidó* 74) However, at the same time the only appropriate response to a flirting, proudly Jewish girl's inquire whether he is a Jew is '*for you not*' (112), as being a Jew for Németh does not allow fitting comfortably in any closed group with its excluded Others but symbolises the existential state of being always the Other.

Twelve years after publishing *Zsidó vagy?* Németh's latest substantial prose work *Egy mormota nyara* (The Summer of a Dormouse) came out in 2016. As the writer commented, the two books belong together as the former one 'describes the genesis of being the Other', the latter 'how people presumed to be Others react to each other's otherness' (Németh, in Marton). The title is taken from a Byron quotation: 'When one subtracts from life infancy (which is vegetation), - sleep, eating, and swilling – buttoning and unbuttoning – how much remains of downright existence? The summer of a dormouse' (Byron cited in Németh, *Egy* 18). The line is cited from Byron's journal in 1813, but the narrator does not show any real interest in the source. The first-person narrator, who addresses his monologue constituting the whole book to his son, holds it against Byron that he keeps quiet about the exact nature of this 'downright existence' in his diaries from 1813 and the narrator makes regular attempts to interpret this statement while he is telling the

story of his new assignment as a ‘location scout’. As one of the best in his profession the narrator-protagonist is looking for the locations for a Byron-movie which is ‘too flat to be an art movie but too lilac to be commercial’, and which ends with the most difficult scene to find the right scenery for, when Byron in the form of a vampire can finally be burnt to ashes ‘by the first rays of the sun’ (20). While the narrator and the story are apparently drifting freely all around Europe, the narration follows a similar trajectory with its casual, colloquial style and fragmented form using occasionally only two-three-word, sometimes more than one-page-sentence paragraphs started in lowercase and separated with blank lines. As the text seemingly arbitrarily alternates among associative diary elements, the film script, quotations about and from Byron and other writers, side notes, additional stories, and reflections on living and writing, a background theme is forming behind the different scenes and episodes, which is primarily concerned about migration in Europe, the experience of otherness and ‘the tragic impossibility of understanding’ (Kőrizs V).

The postmodern, fragmented narrative line presented in the relaxed, outsider voice of the narrator makes the reader subjugated to the ostensibly instinctive storytelling fancy of the protagonist and so creates a feeling of insecurity and disorientation resembling the bewilderment experienced by immigrants. In the novel written with the precision of a musical composition the reader just like the protagonist-narrator and the immigrants presented in the book are in continuous motion searching for the most suitable, appropriate place to live or to die (Visy). On the one hand, the narrator insists on having an internal story structure as he notes, ‘I have not enough time to write briefly, as one thing tugs out the next’ (Németh, *Egy* 16). On the other hand, he is regularly sidetracked by voices ‘talking in his head’ saying quotations, which he cannot identify and ‘only the falseness of the sentence reveals that it has been turned into a lie in the form of printed text’, or by his obsessive drive to explain and reason every act, event and thought correctly and accurately (11).

The doubt towards language’s capability to represent reality formulated in *Zsidó vagy?* is taken further here. The rhythm of the book, the changing length of the sentence-paragraphs resonates with the travelling of the character, it stops, halts and restarts again and again. As Jánossy pointed out ‘since his first book

Gábor Németh has been standing his ground, in reality he wants no-prose; a text written off the rules. The intention is unwavering, similarly to the defeat that has been poetically composed, tackled and won in a fight' (Jánossy). This process is expressed by the narrator when he explains to his son his reason to give up writing as a profession. 'I was collecting once the amazing maxims on writing, but in vein, however hard you try, even the simplest sentence, just take this one here, is undermined' (Németh, *Egy* 31). This observation, however, is also an allusion to Péter Esterházy's[49] diary entry on his book of memoirs. 'Undermined text, as it has to be. What is it like when we can believe that we have the right and reason and possibility to write *whole* sentences (subject, predicate, etc!), but only the world behind our sentences is not there (not anywhere)? The question: what is the *long* sentence like, if not style? (I am talking about a Hungarian sentence.)' (Esterházy). This not only refers to the geographical and historical reality of Hungary during communism but carries a more metaphysical sense as well.

The dilemma for Németh, just as for Esterházy, has two sides as he, admittedly, uses his own life experiences in his work and his protagonist in this novel equally poses the question concerning his memory and language itself. The narrator finds due to the artificiality of 'all the embarrassing rhetorical practice' writing so problematic that he is even coming to not writing (Kőrizs V). The binary opposition and interrelatedness of the unreliability of language and the obsessive desire of accuracy is also apparent in the newly-created compounds and expressions found everywhere in the book. The protagonist gave up writing and turned to images instead and while he never stops contemplating about language he observes and records the world around him through the lens of his camera. Jánossy compared Németh's method to Antonioni's in *Blow up* as 'medium and extreme long shots are made', subjective takes, sharp, then during zooming in more and more porous photos' and through this process 'the event recorded factually is falling apart and something else is appearing' (Jánossy). The protagonist himself calls it 'the manifesting spirit of the location' (Németh, *Egy* 23). 'To the visible places invisible events belong, invisible as they are not in the present but in the "not any more" or the "not yet", some places exist only to have

[49] Péter Esterházy (1950-2016) one of the most widely known contemporary writers in Hungary and the leading figure of Hungarian postmodern literature.

something to happen in or by them, something good or something unredeemable' (69). This belief casts the light of historical-geographical determinism over every single event in the novel, and brings the varied interpretations of destiny articulated by the discussed writers in mind.

The location scout's search starts from Hungary and, as Beatrix Visy observed, 'the area toured is Europe, the Western part, from one beach to the other, to map the final points, let them be Scheveningen and Biarritz, to mark the Western borders, the territory of life, to draw the lines of the horizon' (Visy). His direction of the movement has such an enormous significance because 'in addition or in opposition to the lonely search, meander of the protagonist, there is another, different, scarier and bigger scale movement' of the migrants from all over the world (Visy). The protagonist realises the world-scale movement's unavoidability on a tram in Amsterdam, on which he, as he ironically notes, is 'the one European among coloureds' (Németh, *Egy* 58). His line is an allusion to Attila József's[50], a Hungarian poet, line from his poem 'Welcome for Thomas Mann' written in 1937 in which József addresses Mann as 'the one European among whites' (József). This line has become in Hungary a symbol referring to anyone who is the defender of the European values in opposition to the populism and Euroscepticism promoted by the illiberal governing powers.[51] The irony is born because for a Hungarian and, as it can be seen from his earlier works, for Németh being European has never been an obvious position. It is apparent also in the immediate change in the narration to the second person: as the narrator observes, drawing in his readers: 'you leave a place, where you were born, there is a moment when you decide, when someone has had enough, in nine tenths of the world they produce far enough reasons, a thousand per day, to make you bugger off' (Németh, *Egy* 59). The protagonist realises that this exhausted 'numbed escape' 'will happen, has been happening for a long time […] but with different licences' (59). Therefore, independently of the identity of the escapee and the destination of the escape 'the search for a location is not an alibi but a form of living, even more, a survival strategy' and the question is, as Visy summarises, 'how Europe can deal with her

[50] Attila József (1905-1937) a Hungarian poet of the pre-war period.
[51] János Bródy, a Hungarian singer-song writer, an iconic figure of liberals, released his song 'European among Hungarians' in 2016 as a reaction to the political events in Hungary.

immigrants, her continent turning into a kaleidoscope, her xenophobia and racism' (Visy). When he is working the protagonist, also an outsider visitor, moves only through locations made for tourists and projects his impression that the kinds of livelihood present for immigrants in Europe always involve their subjugation and the commercialisation of their values. The taxi drivers, street sellers, and prostitutes are the ones serving the wants and desires of the Europeans mostly presented as the crowd of holidaymakers who seem to internalise the location scout's recommendation to his son about his profession as it is 'really an airtight alibi for a whole life, wherever you go, you can say that you are working [...] a life that can be disguised as hard-working but that is in fact spent with idleness' (Németh, *Egy* 21).

At the same time, Visy feels that the 'European person's eternal, sort of Faustian restlessness, tireless search, curiosity, desire for knowledge are distilled in the figure of the protagonist' who is 'a professional flâneur, a perpetual traveller or passer-by, a vagabond hunting locations' (Visy). His figure conjures Nietzsche's idea of the Good European but with a twenty-first-century disillusionment and scepticism. Moreover, Visy argues, the protagonist also represents 'the view of the coloniser, who cannot deal with otherness, and so instinctively and imperceptibly subdues it and implicates a relationship that is asymmetric from the beginning and in which the other manifests as an objectified being deprived of individual will' (Visy). Visy believes that this colonising look is the perception of the European majority, which not only is unable to treat these people equal but 'it ignores them, takes no notice of them, as if they were invisible' (Visy). She, however, completely disregards the unique position of the protagonist deriving from his Hungarianness, from coming from the periphery of Europe. The internal differences and peripheries of Europe are so easily ignored in the identification process in opposition to the outside Other. While he poses on the surface as a "real européer" using an English expression describing his profession, paying extreme attention to his fashionable clothes and showing off his familiarity with European literature and cinematography, his reminiscences about his past recurrently establish him as a Hungarian. Furthermore, he can overcome the mere observation of the surface events and show deep insights only when he is back on home ground. These analyses are often, as is customary in the case of Németh, actual personal

memories of the author, discussed already from different perspectives in his previous books. The childhood memory of being nearly killed by a gipsy boy at school is here accompanied by a situation when the adult protagonist cannot again overcome the traditional division that separates Hungarian society into Hungarians and Gypsies. With these scenes Németh braves another topic that is customarily silenced in Hungarian public speech but again show his and every Hungarian's involvement in the feeling of inherited superiority, racism and xenophobia. The conclusion of the attempts to overcome the cultural abyss is that 'you realise that it is hopeless' (Németh, *Egy* 135). When later in life the protagonist runs into his near-assassin, who from the school's most dreaded pupil has become a homeless wreck, he can only record his blood thirst for taking revenge.

What is unique in the protagonist's view is that as an ex-writer and a present location scout while drifting through his life and Europe he cannot stop observing, analysing and reflecting on the actions and interactions of the individual people. From his outsider position he is especially sensitive to the interplay between people from different cultures. However, his perception is more of the vision of his camera, which can capture the photographic details, the visual connections but at the same time objectifies and silences the human participants and this way his perception symbolises the conceit and lack of real empathy of European societies, which do the same with their immigrant foreigners. Despite all, the protagonist's insight, intellect and efforts to employ the humanity and solidarity expected from his social standing he cannot overcome the inability of understanding. He comes to the realisation that 'every understanding is a misunderstanding', which in Németh's explanation is the reason why 'the human world is kept alive by prejudices' (Németh, *Egy* 66; Németh, in Marton). As people have no time to get to know the real story of another person, 'the individual can survive because they immediately judge and get judged and according to these judgements they go on the defensive or the attack' (Németh in Marton). After all his search, the protagonist towards the end of the book as strokes of fate locates the right scene for the vampire Byron's death, finds Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* in a rubbish bin and meets 'his Arab' in the streets. 'The Arab' stands for the amalgamation of all the protagonist's real, art and cultural experiences, dreams, beliefs, and prejudices, of all the

Arabians and Muslims, and so becomes the symbol of any foreign religions and cultures.

The impermeability of religions and cultures, the impossibility of acceptance and inclusion are highlighted in many episodes, but the protagonist's train of thought is mostly arranged to project the fungibility of the positions. '[I]mmense black beetle that shudders, twitches'[52] refers to the eyes both of Theo van Gogh before his murder and of the presumably Thai, underage window prostitute in Amsterdam's Red Light District (Németh, *Egy* 66). The duality of roles is also present in the motif of beggary, which symbol in the novel points to 'the issues of compassion, solidarity, the genuineness or falseness of offering help, the interchangeability of the roles who humiliates and who is humiliated, and the processes when the human body is put up for sale' (Visy). As Visy pointed out, the permanent near on-all-fours position of the young beggar shuffling on wooden bricks in the scene of the Budapest underground, his deformed body is treated as an abject **(**Kristeva**).** The protagonist's question concerning a divined presence 'what I would do if he had done the same to me' and fear that 'he might be after all alive, […] and after all this up there hears through, hears, hears out of me the bloodless, silent, chickenshit question, and sorts it out that once when I am not expecting it at all something similar, similarly kind thing in my life should happen to me' involve all the human race in the metaphysical search for meaning and human fate (Németh, *Egy* 183). The beggar figure is projected into the whole book, and the issues it brings up into all other human relationships.

The Budapest beggar scene, which appeared first in *A tejszínről*, was written as a reflection on Miklós Mészöly's short story 'Koldustánc' (Beggar Dance).[53] The small-change duel between the narrator-protagonist and a church beggar described in Mészöly's short story is replayed in the novel as a contemporary and intellectual match between the narrator and 'his' wire-sculptor Arab. Németh's interpretation of the short-story can be interpreted as relevant in the case of the ending of his novel and provides some holds for understanding the

[52] It can also be interpreted as an allusion to Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* evoking a set of further interpretations.

[53] Mikós Mészőly (1921-2001) Hungarian writer. The short story was written in 1942, first published in 1948 but Mészőly rewrote it later and published again in 1975. Gábor Németh was comparing the two versions of the work.

visceral killing of the Arab by the protagonist. Németh considers the short-story to be an example of the anti-human worldview of Mészöly, which rejects any psychological reading and in which 'the sadistic play, the participants of the 'dance' cannot be seen as changing or cannot be looked at from the distance' and so it exposes 'the cruelty inherent in human relationships, interactions' (Németh, in Szűcs). The 'sun of Camus is shining, in this light the aggression that belongs to living becomes apparent' and this aggression has no 'reason, meaning, it happens *just for the sake of its own*' (Németh, in Szűcs).

Although the murder happens unexpectedly for both the protagonist and the reader, it has been atmospherically building up from the very beginning of the book. From the Easter bunny's merciful killing by the vet through the Algerian war and the detailed description of Theo van Gogh's murder. The protagonist-narrator never forms judgements and rarely feelings but through his final deed he shares his existential experience with the reader. He shows the intricate tangle of empathy and indifference, morality and aesthetics, political correctness and animal instincts. He embodies both the unavoidable and insatiable desire for existential meaning and the bewilderment over the incomprehensibility of living; however, he rejects any kind of partial explanation and braves the freedom of facing alone the totality of existence. This world view is set in opposition with the 'noble pathos' found in the letter of Mohammad Bouyeri, the murderer of van Gogh, quoted in full in the novel and apparent in the behaviour of an African seller believing in his fortune bracelet or of all the Muslims presented in the book. The protagonist feels that 'the style of the letter stabbed into the breast of van gogh[54] was pervaded by some sort of solemnly ponderous, anachronistic, but, even in its clumsiness, a noble pathos, which made it more chilling than if it had been brutal according to the spirit of the age so with the most profane fluency possible' (Németh, *Egy* 82). Interpreting the reactions following this murder he states that 'all those freedoms which at the same time symbolise and legitimise the so-called European culture melt away in a second in the fear of Islam and in the impotence' (89).

The duel between the protagonist and the Arab manifests a strange balance of methodical purposefulness and meaningless aimlessness. The narrator takes

[54] The lack of capital letters depersonalises the event and draws the reader's attention to its symbolic quality.

into consideration all the ways to take away the Arab's dignified position as a wire-sculptor street artist and forces him into the position of the beggar as a revenge of his previous humiliation when the Arab using his street-wisdom tricked him into a situation when getting the cigarette the narrator had refused to offer. The narrator feels the Arab used him only as a puppet to perform his art of deceit and robbed him off his dignity. The interchangeability of the roles in the act of humiliation is also a recurrent motif in the novel. The ' pure art' of exploiting the naivety of the more fortunate is observed in the gypsy boy's forming ownership of the narrator's empty beer bottle at a football match in Hungary or at the Venetian market in the fake performance of double or quits acted out by a gang in order to steal the tourists' cameras. The protagonist, who believes that 'the so-called art is, alas, over, it sleeps its eternal sleep', is amazed by 'the gumption, the cool expertise of survival, the perfect professionalism' and by 'illusionless and infallible knowledge of human character, which you can get only by spending your entire childhood in the streets, and the ownership of which makes you able to operate the most intricate construction, so also the most refined soul even with the roughest, most business-like movements' (17, 117). Therefore in this sense the duel in the novel is between equals for winning the upper hand concerning the deeper understanding of human nature. The narrator had no intention of killing but he kills as a reaction to his partner's action in the duel as 'the Arab held up his knife, athwart the sunlight' (201).

Németh using sections from Albert Camus's *The Stranger* blending it into his prose completely blurs the border between the metafiction and the fictional reality of the novel. The narrator acts out the murder as it is predestined for him by his European fictional ancestors. In the middle of the action an Anton Chekhov quote appears 'if in the first act there is a gun hanging on the wall, then it has to be shot in the third act' and the narrator responds 'but how?' strengthening the puzzlement of the reader as there has been no mentioning of the protagonist's gun beforehand (201). Moreover, the surrealist significance of Camus's sun is also emphasised as the event takes place only at dawn. The inescapable presence of the sun and so the absurdity of existence seems to bother only the Europeans; the protagonist, the tourists 'drunken by the absorbed sunlight' and the typical English

couple, whose ‘faces despite of all the care taken, were burning by the excessive sunbathing, as if they were ceaselessly feeling ashamed of something’ (158).

Just as much the murder and its forerunner, the duel, are unavoidable, they are as absurd. It has no meaning, purpose; it cannot be explained with the tools of psychology, morality, intellect or the mind and it is not commented on by the protagonist either who does not form any judgement over his or the Arab’s actions. The acts of the protagonist are not unreasonable as they only reflect the world and its inextricability. He does not show any fear or remorse and his only purpose, just as in the whole book, is to gain some permanent knowledge about himself and the surrounding world, which he can hand over to his son. The fragmented narrative style, the flow of thoughts and events makes it equally impossible for the reader to approve or disapprove any actions and so unsettles the embedded prejudices.

As the whole book is a testimony to the son, the remembering self (the narrator), in contrast with the observing one (the protagonist), is the book’s driving force: the remembering self who becomes once again the onlooker and occasionally participant when evoking the memory. The novel testifies about the observation itself, about the attention, about the inert pity and participation, with which his eyes are fastened on the immigrants, on the Other, and on the final event. One of the greatest aesthetic sources of Németh’s artistic perspective is that it notices and articulates at the same time the visual appearance and the substance, the unique and the universal, and so it breaks away from the metaphysical separation and prioritisation of the phenomenon and the core essence. The memories and observed situations are selected to capture simultaneously the time-bound presence and a universal reality. The emotional focus point, dynamical centre of the killing glints up already at the beginning of the text and returns throughout it with associations and finally at the very end the fatal memory appears with defensive counter points. The protagonist is never left alone, is not valid in himself, only in the reflection, interpretation of the emotional, temperamental reactions of the narrator. However, the narrator is not an independent subject either, as most of his reactions are responses to the views taken in and he exists only in this relation, in the mutual dependence of the subject and the object. Therefore, the novel blurs the division between the native and the

foreigner, the individual and their Other. He performs such an active, empathic observation that it can be termed as participation in the Other's story and this participation leads finally to the first real active deed, the murder. However, even during and after the murder the observer cannot leave his observant, remembering position, so he in a dreamlike state escapes legal justice and decides to tell his story only to his son but more as a witness than a culprit. The book finishes with this decision on the beach and as it started with the sound of the ocean it returns back to itself forming a never-ending story.

János Pilinszky[55] pointed out about the absurd perception that 'if in a desacralised and deincarnated [consequently an essentially horizontal] world the vertical scope of the verbum is chosen, this happening will equal the moment of suicide and murder, their steep without dimension' (Piliniszky, '*A* teremtő) The narrator-protagonist with the murder of the Arab in a sense commits the termination of his own life, so a kind of suicide, however, these all seem to bring no consequences or lead to no conclusion or redemption. As the narrator poses and answers the question 'is there forgiveness? From forgiveness, there is none' (Németh, *Egy* 13). At the same time and maybe against Németh's wish the whole book is pervaded by the atheist version of what Pilinszky termed 'engagement immobile', 'the efficacy of compassion – without changing or wanting to change anything'[56] (Pilinszky, 'Ars'). Commenting on Camus's criticism of Dostoyevsky's escapism to faith and humbleness, Pilinszky observes that

> above the recognition of the world's absurdity […] there is a more consistent, so to speak, a more absurd step, which is taking on the incongruity of the world. […] this humbleness – taking on the weight of the world's incongruity, dressing in the burden of existence and of our own contradictions – it is everything but escape. (Pilinszky, 'Ars')

[55] János Pilinszky (1921-1981) one of the most influential poets of the twentieth-century Hungary, who had first-hand experience of the horrors of the II World War. He stated that 'what could take place and actually happened between 1939 and 1944 obligates or rather sentences us to feel increasingly unreal what was left behind and even more about everything that happened afterwards and will still happen' (Pilinszky, *A*). Furthermore, Pilinszky believed that the war also made people come into contact with the depth of the poor's life, and experience hunger, thirst and homelessness (Pilinszky, *Ars*).

[56] Pilinszky's poem 'The French Prisoner' is an example of the literary application of 'engagement immobile'. Lajos Jánossy pointed out the possible interpretative connection between Pilinszky's poem and Németh's novel.

He believes that the poor –experiencing daily the unsatisfaction of their basic needs – have been carrying this view as they have incarnated it as the divine presence, while the rich, who signify the beginning of 'deincarnation', 'are striving for getting rid of the impossible burden with the means of pouring the deserted burden of orphan absurdity onto the world' (Pilinszky, 'Ars'). The ordinary criminals are those who 'commit the absurdity, the scandal directly, expecting from the perversity of their direct villainy some kind of reversed enrichment, the never-seen coming of power and freedom' and so 'the suffering of the innocent is not anymore a consequence but the necessary energy-source of the merciless events' (Pilinszky, 'Ars'). Although in the novel the division runs deeper between Europeans and foreigners, the natives and the immigrants, with the glimpses into exploitation and criminality affecting the migrant communities, and into the attitudes of the more fortunate inhabitants of our planet Pilinszky's observation can also be applied to the book. While the protagonist is on the search for some essence that can be satisfied with the empirical world or the creative, liberated imagination, the immigrant figures express the basic, ancient needs, the existential facts ahead of intellectuality and rationalism. Meanwhile the protagonist cannot turn a blind eye towards other people's difference, their suffering and their faith, which attention turns against him and enhances his inquiry into the destructive force in the human nature. These labyrinthine feelings buried deep in the unconscious in everyday life are exposed with clarity in the novel, and its bravery takes the reader to the final conclusion, the murder.

Beatrix Visy argues that the novel represents 'a xenophobia that is apparently insurmountable and more insidious and disheartening than the surface feelings because the masquerade of the caring and humane configurations of civilisation and culture screen the depth of this hatred and its embedment in the foundations' of the European continent (Visy). Here Visy articulates the desperation perceptible in Aldiss's works and a view that is precisely opposite of Nietzsche's. She also feels that the denouement of the novel implies that 'there is no solution for the European migration crisis above the economic, political factors, the nightmare of which is also reflected on' (Visy). According to her, the re-enactment of Camus's *The Stranger* interpreted from the book's anxiety of losing Europe implies that 'as the individual societies and communities are proved to be

unable, every person has to face on their own, has to fight their duel' (Visy). As I have attempted to show beforehand, this interpretation – although valid – touches only a single level of Németh's multi-layered, masterfully composed, intricate empirical and metaphysical search.

The vision of a sad, fading Europe is also drawn through the figure of Lord Byron, who, according to the imagined film script, in the Villa Deodati by the Lake Geneva, where Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* and Byron *Fragment of a Novel*, becomes a vampire and lives to the present of the book, when he is planning to commit suicide because of his ultimate desperation over a romantic disappointment. The character, whose literary work is basically ignored, becomes the symbol of the dying European culture, which has overlived for two centuries and which is turning into 'a snobbish melodrama' (Németh, *Egy* 17). Németh commented on this symbolism as it has been a common belief for a long time that the European culture is 'eternal and unshakable' (Németh in Marton). This belief also involves that this cultural structure is evolutional, so 'it can always renew itself' (Németh, in Marton). 'This illusion would mean the liberal democracy as the polity, the differently voiced solidarities as the attitude; these principles would make this idea function. A kind of stable code system combined from finely structured consensuses that is natural for those who were born in it' (Németh, in Marton). While for the non-European immigrants these codes are foreign, the narrator as someone from the periphery 'knows about this long-matured agreement' but can also detect 'how fragile this consensus is' (Németh, in Marton). Where the book ends with the murder of the Arab is also the location the protagonist felt – after his search throughout Europe – appropriate for the death of the vampire and so the European culture; 'during the nauseating finale they burn to ashes in the first ray of the sunrise' and 'the sea would be the coulisse for the endgame, let it be a vulgar sunrise, as if it was the work of burn-out, cynical scene painters' (Németh, *Egy* 35). The vampire allegory is also applicable for the death of art, the place of which is overtaken by 'pure decoration', which is aptly expressed in Németh's wordplay on Heidegger's notion that in contemporary European culture 'instead of dasein there is only design'. The narrator complains that he has kept seeing vampires everywhere for years as 'this is the fashion, the dried blood in the corner of the lips'

(17). The exploitative nature of human relationships, the lack of solidarity and love, the insatiable thirst for materialistic pleasures are the values treasured.

Németh, who was born in 1956, observed in 2016 that a basic feeling of his generation that they 'cannot give advice about the so-called life to their children in all good conscience' as 'everything has changed, everything has fallen under suspicion in the last twenty-five years, but you still try to play a sure game, to give something you are certain about' (Németh, in Marton). It is telling about the state of Hungary and Europe that the liberal-minded, European thinking writer, who was born in the fateful year of the Hungarian Uprising condemns the period after the end of communism for the loss of beliefs and principles and so shares the disillusionment and disappointment with Kertész, Parks, Lewycka and Aldiss. After all the knowledge and uncertainty faced in the novel, Németh poses the question 'whether one generation can tell anything sensible to the other one', 'whether a father can give anything to his son apart from life' (Németh, in Marton). The narrator's conclusion is the same that the writer gave his son in real life, 'nothing sublime' but at least sure (Németh, in Marton). Places where you 'can experience immaculate moments just for their own sake', '[t]he Bambi and the Rudas' (Németh in Marton) (Németh, *Egy* 15). As the narrator describes, one of these moments is when in the Budapest Rudas Thermal Bath built in the 16th century, 'when the painted glass eyes of the dome just start shining above the central bath because the sun is reaching them exactly at the right angle, you tilt your head back so that your nape just stays in the water and without any real reason, as it were, groundlessly you come to terms with the world' (15). The other one is when in the Bambi Presszó, the very last one of Budapest's places where the 1960s interior design and atmosphere have been maintained, 'you lean back to the red leatherette and listen to the clatter of the dominos at the rear, you have drunk your unicum, you are watching the same sun shining through the pint of black and tan, you are waiting for your scrambled egg, from three eggs with ham and mushroom, to arrive' (15). In the novel about migration and Europe these peaceful experiences are carrying the historical-geographical determinism so essential in the story, such an embedded, deep understanding and appreciation of places that are possible only by not only living in them but also by receiving the cultural wisdom of the past generations. Both places are also examples of locations where the past is not

denied but valued, furthermore, it is not commercialised and exploited for the sake of tourism either. In the era of migration the novel unpretentiously and subtly pays homage to and celebrates place attachment and the devotion to home where the sun is not Camus's sun but the source of life.

Conclusion

‘The Eastern and Western Peripheries’ reference to Hungary and Great Britain in the title might be a controversial notion from geographical, historical, cultural and economic points of view, however, when taking into consideration the current social and political atmosphere, Brexit and the success of the anti-EU campaign run by the illiberal forces in Hungary it becomes rather relevant. At the same time, it is crucial to emphasise and keep in mind the distinction between Europe and the European Union. These events and factors, however, have made it unavoidable to investigate and reconsider the notion of Europe in both countries and hopefully this thesis can contribute to this exploration.

‘What has run out of breath and what has got exhausted?’ asked András Hanák reflecting on the current European political events (Hanák 6). ‘Has the belief or aspiration that it is possible to live in an always just a little bit better and more just way dissolved? That although our world not only creates but destroys as well, all in all, every generation lives better?’ (6). He argues that the spreading of anti-elite feelings and populism, and of blind faith in new strong leaders indicate a European fatigue, ‘the fading of generational memory, the disappearance of the generations with direct experience of the post-wars rebuilding, the slow day-by-day progression, behind which epoch-making transformations were still taking place’ (6). Tim Parks, however, took a more cynical note on Europe and the European Union stating that it has been really the dream of the ‘middle classes, the cultural elite’, as they ‘love the idea that they are taking part in a historic project that will bring peace and prosperity to the Continent, put an end to war, take steps to defend the environment, protect Europeans from superpower ambitions and multinational depredations, etc.’ (Parks, ‘Why’). When these do not happen they prefer to close their eyes as it is not a narrative they ‘like to believe we live in’ (Parks, ‘Why’). Parks urges the European elite to examine this attachment ‘to a narrative that is going nowhere’ (Parks, ‘Why’). He believes that ordinary European citizens find it hard to identify with the European Union as ‘[in] general, the EU’s uncertain status- is it a superstate or a free trade area? – makes it extremely

difficult to know what to expect of it, what to rely on it for, or where it might be heading. Because so many of its members have different ideas about its purpose, decision making is painfully slow and almost never transparent. One rarely feels satisfied by a ruling of the EU. One rarely understands how it was arrived at' (Parks, Brexit). Put it plainly, EU citizens cannot understand the narrative.

Parks feels, however, that 'the Union's greatest failing is that after decades of regulations of every possible kind it has not brought the nations of the Continent closer together' (Parks, 'Why'). In addition,

> the globalisation process hasn't bought EU countries culturally much closer to one another. […] We all read far more American books than German books, see more American films, follow the US elections and so on. […] Overwhelmingly, English is the second language in Europe, and the US, as it were, our second life. Yet when it comes to deciding monetary and trade policies we are restricted and conditioned by cultures we know little about. Above all, Germany. (Parks, 'Brexit')

Although the past and present processes in Europe are certainly much more complex and intricate, Parks's explanation brings up many themes that run through the thesis and regularly come up in the discussed works: the interrelatedness of Europe and the European Union, the tension between national and continental belongings, the conflict between the elite and popular perceptions, the influence of populism, the concept of Europe as a free market or as a community, the positive and negative influences of Brussels, the interwoven nature of globalism and localism, and Europe as heritage, a utopian idea or mundane reality.

A new European narrative was José Manuel Barroso's proposal in 2013 to tackle the problems of the Union.

> I think we need, in the beginning of the XXI century, namely for the new generation that is not so much identified with this narrative of Europe, to continue to tell the story of Europe. Like a book: it cannot only stay in the first pages, even if the first pages were extremely beautiful. We have to continue our narrative, continue to write the book of the present and of the future. (Barroso, cited in Applebaum)

Although his allusion to the extremely beautiful character of the first pages in this narrative rings out of tune with the European Union's history, his and Parks's

conflation of Europe's reality with her narrative resonates with this thesis's fundamental belief in the social role of literature.

Although all the six writers approached the narrative of Europe from strikingly different perspectives, from separate generational, social, cultural, ideological, and philosophical backgrounds, there have been still certain motifs, themes, and tunes appearing in their joint analysis. How can a narrative be formed if language is contaminated and inadequate to describe reality is one of the most urgent dilemmas faced by the writers. On the one hand, language is exposed to extreme contamination and, as Péter L. Varga observes, some of the most burdened elements of language today are democracy, bourgeois, politics, and freedom (Varga 13). On the other hand, it is fragmented and inadequate. Németh's narrator as a child learns 'the language, which is full of barely perceptible fractures, gaps and abysses, of a world familiar in its absurdity' (Schein 382). 'Their presence is indicated most apparently in the unspoken prohibitions and they repressively educate for the acquirement of a language usage that is suspicious and severely burdened by historical-sociopsychological crises while ignoring them' (382).

Németh, in accordance with the other discussed writers' theories on fiction, believes that the novel 'carries the experience that the world is indescribable and still it makes a heroic attempt to find some sort of great form' to contain it (Németh, in Károlyi 79). This heroic attempt is also unavoidable because of another aspect of the problematic notion of language usage identified by Németh. He argues that the Hungarian [as every other nation's] public speech is usually engaged with indicating the problem that should be talked about but then does not discuss it […] because it comes up against a great deal of politically incorrect things and it is scared of this' (Németh, in Károlyi 79). He believes that 'when certain linguistic phenomena are banned because of principles, what really happens is that the accompanying emotions are suppressed and these suppressed feelings will start to be articulated in different ways searching to find ways to resurface […] a different erosion begins, the issue is not resolved but becomes even more complex' (Németh, in Alinda). Literature has the means to overcome this contradictory and self-defeating course of reflexes.

However, not only language is full of fractures, gaps and abysses but memory as well both on the levels of the individual and society, especially as the

past is often rewritten and reappropriated by succeeding regimes. This is the reason why for all writers the German example of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”, or, in translation, “coming to terms with the past”/”past elaboration” becomes unavoidable. All the novels describe a Europe that has not been able to recover from wars and ‘remains tormented by a collective inability to know, express and mourn the period’s multiple atrocities, as well as by a tendency to repeat the offences (prejudice, violence, exclusion) which caused those atrocities’ (Hammond 25).

The general sense of loss and aimlessness forces all the writers and their main characters on a quest to make sense of the European world, to understand the underlying forces, to search for acceptable goals. Not only the characters, the plots but also the narrations are restless travellers on the road to find meaning on the metaphysical and psychological levels, furthermore, on the level of mundane life as Kertész’s and Aldiss’s characters are looking for solutions, Végel’s and Lewycka’s for survival strategies and Parks’s and Németh’s for adequate life-styles. On the surface the fragmentation and ruthlessness of the narrative language in all of the novels lead to a feeling of disorientation, anxiety and lack of direction, however, the recurrent motifs create a more profound sense of unity. This form conveying so genuinely the motifs of the plot is symbolic of the life promoted by the Nietzschean active nihilists, his free-spirits, his good Europeans. Moreover, this kind of narrative also expresses the joy of search as it is celebrated by the writers, their narrators and also in the playful, explorative, festive usage of language.

The search is also for a feeling of personal and community destiny or at least for an understanding whether individual and collective history is an arbitrary succession of events, a fate, or a consequence of individual choices. The issue how much individual fate is determined by the geographical location, the ethnic and social status at birth or by the wheel of fortune in life and how much it is influenced by political agencies is also recurrent in the novels. For the writers a possibility to reclaim one’s individual destiny is through narration and the collective destiny through literature’s role as testimony. Testimony of an absurd world with the means of an inadequate language, which inherently with its national links is a determining

factor, a personal destiny. Németh's muses, echoing the other writers' concepts of literature, that

> [t]he great amount of annoying and posturing effing about why it is this way and not in another way is there because you have a very strong perception of how arbitrary it is that you have become exactly that person who you are. That you are going exactly to that direction. There are people who are sensitive to smells, I am to possibilities. The necessity of choice is connected somehow to concepts. Before language the whole of the world still exists. (Németh, in Károlyi 78)

The writer's role as bearing witness is inexorably connected to the linguistic impossibilities discussed in the thesis. All the writers and their narrators take on the burden of writing testimony of Europe's past and present and of embarking on an investigation to solve the dilemma whether Europe means and possesses a destiny. Furthermore, the enigma of destiny transforms also into a metaphysical question with the inseparable ethical dilemmas.

Another puzzlingly common motif is the trope of Byronic journeys – more to forget than to find. The writers and their main characters share the feeling of outsiderness of being the other, of not fitting nicely within their communities. This sentiment ranges from an enforced position to an internally born feeling. Németh comments

> [i]t is rarely discussed what happens if a person is socialised to believe that their environment is determined by their "superiors" as the only possible order. The experience of otherness is infernal because one is searching themselves in order to find the error, the sin, the offence that they have committed by feeling other. Since in a good world only the bad feels alien. (Németh, in Károlyi 79)

In the case of the Hungarian writers this development from the original shame to a celebratory state of mind is observable in the characters' attitudes towards Jewishness. On the one hand, it is telling that Kertész, Végel and Németh are rather interested in the separateness Jewishness implies and provokes than its community-belonging aspect. On the other hand, the feeling of otherness has positive consequences. Lark Dencik emphasised that

> [l]iving in the Diaspora always means to be an outsider and insider. This duality has often served as a source for both intellectual creativity and social criticism. It requires of the "diasporic person" or organized diasporic group a well-developed ability to cope with ambiguity and a pronounced willingness and ability to make oneself at home within a certain kind of homelessness. (Dencik 99)

Social, cultural, minority schizophrenia presented by the writers is turned into celebration, into a positive interpretation. This affirmative attitude of transforming a passive acceptance of a situation and turning it into an active standing, so similar to Elbe's interpretation of Nietzsche's passive and active nihilism, can be observed in all of the novels. They without exception come to some kind of realisation and acceptance of the ambiguity present in being a "good European" and acknowledge and say yes to the existential responsibility of choosing autonomy over dependency on established identity standards.

The complexity of this position is aptly expressed in Braidotti's concept of being 'a nomadic European subject', which means 'to be in transit within different identity formations, but sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility for it' (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 75). This stand also entails taking on the responsibility for the partial perspective deriving from being European. On the personal level she advocates for the feminist politics of location, which is 'both a strategy and a method based on politically informed cartographies of one's position, starting not from gender alone, but from a bundle of interrelated social relations' (92). She emphasises that the politics of location is 'best served by a non-unitary vision of the subject that stresses nomadic complexity and open-endedness' (92). This commitment is already present in the Nietzschean active nihilism of the good Europeans which also promotes self-reflexivity, accountability and the uncompromising and unsentimental search for ethical answers. In resistance to the rational economic solutions of the selfish egotist Last Man, whose principles seem to be pervading present-day Europe, the good Europeans represent the courage and commitment to cultivate a spiritual and intellectual freedom which enables the independence from the false authority gained from nationalist, racist, religious and economic will to truth. The necessary relentless dedication is fuelled by the affirmative vitality of this endeavour and by the joy of discovery and creation, which is also distinctly noticeable in each discussed work.

However, there is a price to be paid for this independence, which is on the one side, homelessness, as it is probably most apparent in the case of Végel's stateless patriot, on the other, being objectified to the negative projections of a large part of society. Aversion is not only directed towards free-spirits but also there have been recurring far-right developments in Europe as anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and anti- refugee, and, as Hammond emphasised, in present Europe there are still minority ethnicities 'whose experiences have resembled those of colonised populations elsewere', one among many are the Hungarian Roma population (Hammond 19). At the same time the East-West divide in Europe is still perceptible and runs so deep that it is even detectable in the case of some of the discussed writers in their unintentional use of stereotypes most visible in the patronising and essentialized notion of Eastern-European characters. Lewycka's books reveal a power structure in which the Eastern-European immigrant is denied both complexity and equality. As Bianca Leggett points out, 'stereotypes tend to numb the imaginative sympathy and sensitivity to difference which is an essential part of any relationship' (Leggett 8). The Eastern-European characters who on the surface represent the increasingly integrated nature of contemporary Europe in reality reveal a still deeply divided Europe. This tendency is, however, detectable on the other side as well as it is exemplified by the British characters in Kertész's *The Union Jack*, in Végel's European elite and in the English couple in Németh's novel. One wonders whether the insistence on cultural essentialism is still crucial in the identity formation process.

The complex web of the self-other binary can also be observed in the fragmentation of Europe, the spreading appeal of narrow nationalism and in the geographical differentiation among immigrants. The defining principles of worthy and unworthy immigrants have never been stable. The Eastern Europeans are equally accepted and hated in the UK because of their and their countries' commitment to capitalism. To understand this phenomenon it is crucial to emphasise the nature of capitalism in Eastern Europe. As the WReC summarises, '[i]n "Eastern-Europe" the post-communist transition to capitalism has been profoundly *destabilising*, not simply because it has involved the tearing down of the discredited communist cultures, but because it has compounded and exacerbated the distorted patterns of the development that marked the communist era. The

dehumanising violence and brutality of the old dispensation have been matched and even intensified by the new, ferociously unbound, neoliberal dispensation, bent on imposing "market democracy" though economic shock therapy' (WReC 119). This can result in that, especially apparent in the novels of Lewycka's, 'the true face of capitalism, in which the profit and prosperity of a few are made possible through the exploitation of most' can be presented dramatically with Eastern-European figures (WReC 118). In the case of Eastern-European post-communist societies, the issue 'is less to do with the difficulties of 'transition', […] – chaotic and unregulated as that process was and remains – than with the volatility and crisis-ridden quality of capitalism itself' (WReC 119). It is observable in both the Western and Eastern narratives about post-communist life. The binary structure of the thesis has also provided the possibility to present a more varied image of migration.

The Christian notion and inheritance of Europe, which are presented in some of the novels as controversial, deeply divided and divisive, have contributed not just to anti-Semitism but also to anti-Muslim feelings across Europe. In the current neo-fascist and right-wing politics the religious dimension of the divide between European and non-European is defined as a Christian frontier against Muslims, against immigration from the Middle-East, which has a centuries-long history. Another aspect of Europe's Christian heritage, which is also investigated in Parks' latest book *In Extremis*, is the conflict between hedonistic individualism and Christian self-abnegation. Parks also draws attention to the tension between Europe as an overpowering centralising power and Europa as the raped female victim, who, despite or because of once being the object of desire, becomes corrupted by her admirers. Europa is the embodiment of a dream, for Lewycka's characters of a European Home with peace and happiness, for Parks's narrators of a place for an enforced permanent stillness. For the Hungarian narrators Europa is a treasured, idealised image of an unattainable vision that nevertheless was providing a survival source during the communist years but she has quickly got betrayed, depraved, and perverted by the post-communist reality. For the British characters her depredation is happening slowly while she is metamorphosing from a welfare-oriented and social-minded community to a neoliberal market with only a fading sense of nostalgia and disillusionment lingering on.

Meanwhile,

> [g]lobalization and new technologies such as biotechnology and digital information technology, by reinforcing each other, profoundly reshape the conditions of social life […]. Furthermore, the pace of change is accelerating. These continuous processes of social transformation challenge the individual. […] More than ever before, change becomes the natural order of life. […] Nothing is automatically valid just because it *used* to be so. (Dencik 76)

Postmodernization enhance the requirements for the characteristics of the nomad or homeless and cosmopolitanism becomes the natural way of life. These processes, however, go hand in hand with a renewed sense of localism and novel ways of home attachment. How these circumstances and development that shape the world around us alter the notion of Europe, whether it is possible to resist them or what are the methods of adjustments are the questions that can form the trajectory of future research. Especially, as due to time and scale constraints the thesis has been forced to reach a temporary conclusion without including writers from the succeeding generations – for example, writers who have grown into adulthood in the atmosphere of a united Europe.

In their research on national feeling and European identity a group of Hungarian sociologists in 2007 observed that the development of a new communicational medium which makes it possible to create connections among its points as well as to change these connections at any time, and the economical, social and cultural globalisation processes result in the 'devolution of the nation-state' (Örkény et al. 11). 'The continued existence of the nations in the Information Age stands or falls by how they will be able to appear and act in the new communicational environment' (Örkény et al. 11). The traditional political borders have been losing their significance as 'supranational organisations have appeared and have been operating in more and more efficient ways' (Örkény et al. 12). These supranational organisations include federate and confederate unions and groups of states, functional international organisations, multinational companies and so on. At the same time in the nation-states there have been regional communities organising based on the rebirth of local identities showing how the processes of globalization can lead to localization. The nature of people's migration

has been also changing, as before it was characterised by the intention of settlement so the immigrants were at the same time emigrants as well.

> The new migration already provides new working and living opportunities for millions without forcing them to assimilate. Cross-categories are forming, which results in the disappearance of the divide between foreign and national, and in the softening of the opposition between the minority and majority. The conditions of the information technology overwrite the social structural determinations and, among the classical types of capital, the organisational aspects of social hierarchies are pushed into the background in order to give place to social capital. (Örkény et al. 12)

The next logical step of the research is the exploration of how the new generations of writers see these processes and interprets their and their readers' belonging to Europe. Moreover, it should also extend its scope onto the ways language and cultural performance are influenced by a freer European and also by a global discourse and onto the consequences of these processes.

The other gaps in the thesis that need further attention are the lack of more sound connections between the individual writers, the British and Hungarian literary words, the historical and literary periods. The unbalance among the national representatives of different genres, such as science-fiction, diary-novel, romantic comedy, etc. needs also to be settled. More work is necessary on making a clear distinction between the writers' and their narrators' perspectives.

The discrepancy between the thesis' great methodological ambitions inspired by world literary theories and the curious lack of interest in a systematic analysis of what contemporary writers think about Europe, consequently a great abyss in the available materials for comparative analysis on a broader scale, has resulted in the deficiency of a deeper research into the countries' book industries, these nations' attitudes towards each other's works, the reasons behind selecting certain works for import and the marketing strategies. The policies and effects of translation, and the popular and critical reception and interpretation of the imported works by foreign audiences comparing them with these works' reception and interpretation at home could be a further trajectory in order to understand the workings of both the source and target cultures and to seek out cultural similarities

and differences and to interpret the diverse meaning of European identity and of Europe as a community.

At the same time, the issue of translation or rather the shortage of it has greatly influenced the thesis and so provides another area for further research. Especially, as Eliot Weinberger remarked, 'translation is much more than an offering of new trinkets in the literary bazaar. Translation liberates the translation-language. Because a translation will always be read as a translation, as something foreign, it is freed from many of the constraints of the currently accepted norms and conventions in the national literature' (2). The close investigation of translations is crucial as translators

> are preoccupied with what is different in the foreign author, that which is not already available among writers in the translation-language, how that difference may be demonstrated, and how the borders of the possible may be expanded. Bad translations provide examples for historical surveys; good translations are always a form of advocacy criticism: here is a writer one ought to be reading and here is the proof. (Weinberger, 9)

The thesis by introducing László Végel's and Gábor Németh's works, none of which is yet available in English translation, is humbly advocating for making these works accessible for British and European readers.

The comprehensive investigation of literary prizes and their effects on the writers would not only be interesting as it could, as suggested by Casanova, help to understand literary power relations but also it could assist in understanding the accepted literary preferences and norms of the countries. Focusing merely on the functioning of the European Union Prize for Literature, the selected writers and their circulation and their differing receptions in the particular literary markets would bring interesting insights into the area of European literature. The EUPL is primarily interested in 'non-national" literary works – the definition, validity and usage of this category in itself could be the theme of a research – and contemporary 'intercultural dialogue' (EUPL). In the thesis, however, a complex interconnected and interrelated web of European writers of present and past time has materialised through the influence of, among many, Nietzsche, Kafka, Camus, Beckett and Bernhard. This European literary network could also be discovered in more detail.

The investigation can be extended to the discussed writers' newly published books as well, for example, Lewycka's *The Lubetkin Legacy* (2016), Németh's *Ez nem munka* (This is not work) (2017), and Parks's *In Extremis* (2017). Not to mention other significant British and Hungarian writers who are engaged with the topic of Europe, just to name a few, Julian Barnes, Charlotte Mendelson, A. D. Miller, Péter Nádas, Noémi Szécsi, Rose Tremain.

Another direction to follow is formulated in Braidotti's feminist theory, which emphasises that feminism 'is not only a movement of critical opposition of the false universality of the subject, it is also the positive affirmation of women's desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity. This project involves both the critique of existing definitions and representations of women and also the creation of new images of female subjectivity' (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 158). On the one hand, there is an urgent need to continue the research on specific female perspectives on Europe by concentrating on female writers from both countries. Especially, as the analysis from feminist perspective has not been fully carried out and consistently applied to all of the discussed novels, and no Hungarian writers have been discussed. On the other hand, the investigation and deconstruction of the existing notions should be followed by the exploration of novel interpretations and solutions.

The notion of destiny as Europe and for Europe is an additional field wanting deeper and overarching discussion relating to and including all metaphysical and ethical implications. Here as with all the other possible trajectories the question naturally arises why concentrate on Europe and not – due to environmental and social concerns, and to the belief in the urgent need for the formation of a global community – on the whole of the Earth. Passerini's own personal motivation resonates with my own: the reasons are 'lasting desire for internationalism combined with an awareness of the need to proceed one step at a time, and to find intermediate form between the kinds of belonging possible today and those of the future alluded to in the left's metaphor "citizens of the world" (Passerini, 'The Last' 51).

Braidotti places 'the affirmative ethics of sustainable futures' in opposition to the reigning feelings: on the one side, 'general lethargy, the rhetoric of selfish genes and possessive individualism', on the other, 'the dominant ideology of

melancholic lament' (Braidotti, 'Postsecular' 60). For her it is 'a deep, selfless generosity, the ethics of non-profit at an ontological level (60). When thinking about the Nietzschean notion of Good European as a possible future vision, I wish to appropriate again Braidotti's feminist mission. She believes that changes and transformations cannot be created 'by sheer volition', by 'wilful self-naming', but rather

> transformation can only be achieved through de-essentialized embodiment or strategically re-essentialized embodiment: by *working through* the multilayered structures of one's embodied self. Like the gradual peeling off of old skins, the achievement of change has to be earned by careful working through; it is the metabolic consumption of the old that can engender the new. Difference is not the effect of will-power, but the result of many, of endless, repetitions. […] One must start by leaving open spaces of experimentation, of search, of transition: becoming-nomads. (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 171)

My thesis has tried to add to this process following my relentless belief in the future of Europe as a community.

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